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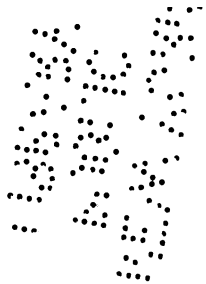

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PROFILES

I

IT was one of the first warm afternoons of the year; the vigorous rays of the sun lent the young leaves, whose delicate green suffused the wood, an exquisite transparency.

All was still; the rushes clustered immobile on the banks of the little stream; no breath of wind ruffled its surface.

Alone a water-rat splashed, and gently rippling the water, swam across.

On the bank a girl was sitting, her white cotton dress rucked about her knees, displaying a small pair of muddy boots, which dangled close to the water's surface. Her body was thrust forward in a cramped position, as with both hands she held a long, clumsy-looking fishing-rod. She was watching

intently the movements of a fat, red float, which bobbed excitedly up and down.

She was bareheaded, and her crisp, auburn hair was riotously tumbling about her ears and neck.

Quite pale was her skin, but pale, transparent, soft; exquisite was the modelling of her fresh, firm lips.

There were great possibilities of beauty in the face; but now an all-absorbing look filled it, the forehead puckered over the eyebrows, the lips set tight together.

A little way off, on the grass, a young man, in a grey flannel suit, was lying on his back, his face shaded by her big-brimmed straw hat, inside the ribbon of which were tucked some bunches of primroses; one hand thrust in the armhole of his waistcoat, the other thrown back over his head—the limp abandon of his pose betrayed that he was asleep.

Down darted the fat, red float. Awkwardly the girl tugged at the rod; the line tightened, swaying about from side to side.

"Maurice!" she called; then louder, as he did not wake.

Maurice started, pushed the hat from off his eyes, murmuring sleepily—

"Hullo! what's up?"

"Make haste, do! I can't hold the rod any more."

He jumped up, took it, and in a minute or two the fish was floundering on the grass, its sleek, silver sides gleaming in the sunlight.

"Why, Lilly, it's quite a big one," he exclaimed.

Tall, with fine, broad shoulders, and a small, well-shaped head, evidently not a quite young man; but a trick of raising his eyebrows with an air of boyish surprise, made him appear some years younger.

"He pulled like anything. I should have had to let go the rod in another minute. My arms ache all over," she added, ruefully.

"That rod's too heavy for you. I'll have to get another, if we're coming fishing again."

"Oh, yes! Of course we are. I love it."

Quite beautiful she looked, her face lit up in a delicate flush of excitement.

"Put on another worm, quick. There's sure to be some more, aren't there?"

Maurice pulled out his watch.

"Nearly four o'clock," he said, shaking his head. "I've got a guard at half-past five. We must pack up."

At once her face clouded, the eyes half-closed, the mouth drooped, the chin pouted.

A pettish exclamation was on her lips, but, catching sight of an amused twinkle in Maurice's eyes, she checked herself, and her face cleared.

Together they unscrewed the rod, and when they had put the joints into their canvas case, they started off through the wood, along the narrow path that led to the village.

Maurice, with the rod under his arm, and a long cigar in the corner of his mouth, Lilly bareheaded, her hair more unruly than ever, carrying her hat and her parasol in her hand.

II

They were engaged to be married, Lilly and Maurice. It had been so for nearly three months.

Lilly lived with her Aunt Lisbet in a semi-detached villa on the outskirts of Guildford, where Maurice's regiment was quartered.

She had never known her mother; when she ransacked the dim memories of her childhood, there was nobody further back than Aunt Lisbet. Her father she scarcely remembered at all, for he had died when she was quite a little girl. He had been a bookmaker, and a coloured photograph of him—a burly, red-faced man, in a white top-hat, and a long, grey dust coat with a scarlet flower in the button-hole—hung over the fire-place in Aunt Lisbet's bedroom. Underneath the photograph was written, James Maguire—"Big Jock."

During his lifetime "Big Jock's" good luck had been almost proverbial, so that he was reputed to be worth a "tidy pile." But at his death, when all

his debts had been paid, scarcely a hundred pounds remained. What had become of it all no one knew, and Aunt Lisbet had never forgiven her brother for this mystery. The disappearance of the money itself exasperated her; but the thought that for years he had been secretly making away with large sums without a word to her, his sister, who had kept house for him since his wife's death, and who had been a second mother to his child, made her especially furious.

This bitter feeling against her brother, instead of subsiding as time went on, only rankled the more in her mind, and now, except in terms of abuse she never mentioned his name.

She was a thin, sharp-boned, little woman, with red lids to her greenish-coloured eyes, a long, aquiline nose and a pointed chin. When she spoke to Lilly of her father, there came into her voice a curious, rasping intonation.

Aunt Lisbet drank; chiefly brandy, and her drunkenness took the form of fits of ungovernable passion.

These outbursts were almost always directed

against Lilly ; not that Aunt Lisbet had any particular personal animosity towards her niece, but because Lilly was the handiest object on which to vent her feelings.

She would begin by recalling some evil trait in Jock's character. Lilly had no really tender affection for her father's memory, the little she knew of him was far from creditable. But this disparagement of him by Aunt Lisbet somehow made her blood boil, and at times the scenes between them were very violent.

And though, except for these occasions, they seldom quarrelled, Lilly loathed Aunt Lisbet with an instinctive, imperious loathing.

And this afternoon, as she drove home in the dog-cart by Maurice's side, her hatred for her aunt seemed fiercer than it had ever been before.

III

The horse's hoofs rang clear on the hard, white road, as they sped swiftly along, Lilly leaning against Maurice's shoulder, plunged in a brown study.

Presently she said, meditatively: "What is the earliest date on which your father can arrive?"

"Well, he won't leave Bombay for another fortnight, then he'll not hurry himself on the journey, so it will be at least a month before he reaches England. It's a beastly long time, isn't it?"

"Oh, Maurice! What's the good of waiting? He will never consent, let's get married at once."

Recklessly he dropped the reins and taking her face in his gloved hands, held it up to his. Their lips met, and putting both his arms round her, he strained her to him. The kiss was a long one; at last she gave a little moan; he let her go.

"You don't know the old gentleman, you see," he continued. "My infernal busybodies of relations have been writing all sorts of tales about you—at least, not about you, but about your aunt and your father, and about—well, a lot of damned rot." But directly he's seen you, I shall be able to make it all right with him. Of course, if you really wish it, we could get married next week, but I think it would be more prudent to wait. The very fact that I had not waited till his return might put his

back up, and he might cut off my allowance on the spot."

"Of course, Maurice, we'll wait. It was selfish of me to think of it. But—but——"

"Well?

"I do hate Aunt Lisbet so."

"I know; but it's not so very long now."

They were entering the town.

"Shall I drive you to the door?"

"No, drop me at St. Luke's. I'll walk home from there."

He pulled up and she got down.

"Be at Mrs. Newton's in good time to-morrow afternoon," he called out, as, smartly flicking the horse, he rattled away down the street.

IV

The solitary candle flickering on the dressing-table made the shadows of the coming night creep back into the corners of the room, as Lilly, with swollen eyelids, and red patches on her cheeks, looked out through the window-pane.

All was still. The earth slept.

The moon poured her white light on the meadows opposite; a few fleecy clouds lazily chased one another across the sky. In the distance a dog barked, then all was again still.

Lilly threw herself on the bed, burying her face in the pillow.

And presently the cool linen began to soothe her burning forehead.

It had passed, the wild impulse to throw herself out of the window that people might know to what Aunt Lisbet had driven her. Now the resolve never to see her again ousted all else from her mind. Absolute, irrevocable was this resolve; any departure from it was as a physical impossibility. Only she must wait till morning, and she turned to a cooler spot on the pillow.

And as she did so, a vivid vision of the scene in the kitchen below started before her eyes. Aunt Lisbet leaning against the dresser, her hair slipping down on one side, and in her voice a hissing sound.

It was the first time that she had said things

about Maurice; that was what had made it worse than it had ever been before.

A blind desire to silence her, to stamp the life out of her, swept over Lilly. Seizing the parasol which lay on the kitchen-table, with all her strength she hit Aunt Lisbet across the side of the head.

And over the thought of that blow she lingered, recalling it again and again, repeating it in her mind with a strange, exquisite pleasure. For into it she had put the hatred of years.

Aunt Lisbet uttered a low, plaintive moan—the curious moan of sudden pain—and fell, dragging with her on to the floor a pile of plates.

The crash sent every nerve in Lilly's body tingling, but when, a moment later, Aunt Lisbet moved to get up, the blind, murderous desire returned. Another brutal blow of the parasol, and she knocked her back again.

With a dull thud her head bumped on the floor; and that thud was the point of reaction.

Its hideous sound seemed to pierce Lilly through and through; in a fit of hysterical sobbing she sank into an armchair.

Slowly Aunt Lisbet rose to her feet, and muttering incoherently under her breath, staggered out of the room.

Round and round all these incidents Lilly's thoughts revolved, dwelling on them, brooding over them, unable to escape from them.

And each time that she thought of the hissing sound in Aunt Lisbet's voice, the blind, murderous feeling swept over her, and each time that the thud of Aunt Lisbet's head on the floor sounded in her ears, the tears welled up in her eyes.

V

The Charing Cross platform was alive with people, some hurrying hither and thither, others standing together in groups or sauntering up and down.

Suddenly the fierce panting of an engine echoed through the building, and a cloud of dense smoke rose to melt away under the curved roof.

It was nearly a quarter to one, for when Lilly had awoken in her little bedroom at Aunt Lisbet's,

weary and unrefreshed through having slept in her clothes, the morning was already half gone. Downstairs and out of the house she had crept, meeting only the servant-girl, who told her with a smirk that her aunt was still sleeping.

Her first impulse had been to go straight to the "Barracks" to ask Maurice to take her away and marry her at once. It seemed the only alternative, for never again would she set foot in Aunt Lisbet's house.

But, as she hurried through the town, there came upon her, like a spasm of physical pain, a feeling of irresolution. She remembered what Maurice had said yesterday—"It's not for so very long." She foresaw that he would advise her to go back and put up with it for a few weeks more, and that she would have to argue with him about it. The courage to face such a prospect was wanting.

No, there was only one thing, take the train for London, telegraph to Maurice to meet her there. Then he *must* understand how impossible it was for her to go back.

And this she had done.

Three hours and three quarters to wait till the next train from Guildford, even if Maurice got the telegram in time. He might not be at the barracks when it arrived. At four, of course, he would go to Mrs. Newton's, as they had arranged yesterday. But would he go back home beforehand? And if not, would his servant send on the telegram, or keep it till his return? These and many other possibilities whirled through Lilly's brain as anxiously she paced the platform.

* * * * *

Four hours had passed. The porters lined the platform edge as rapidly the train drew up. The doors flung open; out swarmed the crowd.

But Maurice was nowhere to be seen. Eagerly Lilly looked for him, up and down; once she fancied that she saw him talking to a porter at the other end of the train.

Desperately she pushed through the crowd, only to find herself face to face with a stranger.

There was not another train till five, and then not another till half-past seven.

With a numb feeling of hopelessness she wandered out into the Strand.

It had just stopped raining. Noisily the omnibuses splashed past, while the hansoms, one after another, crawled along the edge of the pavement.

Some hungry-looking boys were yelling the contents of an evening paper, two flower-girls and an old man selling bootlaces, stood in the gutter. Along the pavement, brown, and a-glimmer with the wet, poured a continual stream of men and women.

No one took any notice of Lilly, they only jostled roughly past her. And somehow the sight of all these strange faces and the movement of this seething turmoil made her feel sick and faint.

For the first time she realised her absolute loneliness.

* * * * *

The five-o'clock train and the seven-o'clock train had both come in, but still no signs of Maurice.

The last train was due at twenty minutes past nine.

Lilly sat staring lifelessly before her. She had

scarcely eaten anything all day ; exhausted, she was suffering much, but so great was her nervous tension, that she did not know that it was hunger.

What she would do if Maurice did not come she never considered. All her energy was occupied in counting the minutes till the train was due.

At last! That must be it! She had not the strength to move, but intently watched the passengers as they poured out through the barrier.

Yes! Maurice!—hastening towards her, yet somehow not looking as she had expected him to look.

VI

Maurice, rising abruptly from the breakfast-table, and throwing open the window, looked down on to the crowded street, for their rooms in the hotel faced the Strand.

Delicate, grey-blue streaks of smoke curled restlessly upwards; in streamed the morning sunlight, bathing Lilly in its full flood.

A newspaper lay before her on the sofa; but she

was observing Maurice with stealthy glances from under her dark eyelashes.

Solemnly the clock ticked, while, with obvious constraint, he hummed discontentedly to himself.

An instant ago their voices were raised in angry dispute—not the first, though they had been but three days together. And Maurice, as he gazed out on to the sea of roof-tops, recalled the trivial incident from which their quarrel had sprung. The thought formed a central spot of pain amid the monotony of his gloom.

For the twentieth time he was aimlessly brooding on the change that had come over her.

Never for a moment had he treated her dislike for Aunt Lisbet seriously, though he had sympathised with it, vaguely, distantly. Lilly was to blame for this he thought: beyond occasional references, she had told him nothing, and, in his blind contentedness, he had never troubled to question her. Besides, instinctively, even in thought, he had shrunk from that side of her life. It jarred upon him.

They had spent the night after his arrival to-

gether; it had seemed the more natural thing. Maurice only had hesitated for an instant with an indefinable shrinking. And when in the morning Lilly suddenly sat up in bed, and began the explanation of her flight, he listened impatiently to what seemed a series of clumsy and unnecessary exaggerations. He had imagined, with a subtle tickling of vanity, that somehow she had been driven to it out of love for him, and he felt an annoyance, vague but real, at learning that it was not so.

But in a minute or two this had passed; in bewilderment he lay watching her.

Tremulously, with a look of passionate fierceness, her face was working as if some strange light were playing on it.

She had done. He knew that every word was true.

And afterwards, if, at odd moments, the improbability of it all flashed upon him, the recollection of that look would at once drive all doubt from his mind.

No longer could he love her lazily as before.

The half-girl, half-child, simple and heedless, with occasional moods of confiding, dreamy gravity, and fits of charming pettishness, the easy dispelling of which he had enjoyed, was gone.

The events of the past few days had broken down the barrier, behind which the strong passions of her nature had laid dormant, and now, let loose for the first time, they mastered her; she was their slave.

Capricious and irritable, with outbursts of nervous exasperation, followed by hot tears of remorse and a desperate sensuality that disturbed and almost frightened him.

And strangest of all, when he had proposed yesterday that they should be married at the end of the week, with an evasive reply she had at once started another topic.

As he turned to throw away his cigarette, he saw that she was by his side. How silently she had crossed the room! Putting both hands on his shoulders, she murmured:

"Maurice, dear Maurice, kiss me; don't be angry with me."

VII

"We must go back to Guildford, to-morrow," he said, after a pause. "I can't get any more leave, and there are all kinds of arrangements to be made down there—fresh quarters, servants, and heaps of things. You can stay at Mrs. Newton's till everything is ready," he went on hurriedly, "it will only take a few days and then we will come back here and get married. I will keep on the room, so that there will be no difficulty about a licence."

"I don't want to go back. I hate the place," she muttered sullenly.

"But, Lilly dear, do be reasonable. There's nothing else to be done."

"You can go alone, I shall stay here till you come back."

Angrily he was on the point of replying, but the words died away on his lips. Expostulation, he saw, would be worse than useless.

He went on to tell her about a red-tiled house just outside the town, on which he had had his eye

for months, but catching sight of her face, he stopped short, and burst out despairingly:

"Why, Lilly, doesn't it interest you?"

"I don't think I could ever go back," she answered slowly.

"But we can't live anywhere else, unless I exchange, and that would take time."

A pause, during which she was nervously tearing strips off the edge of the newspaper.

"How long will you be away?" she asked at length.

"Let's see, to-day's Wednesday. If I go to-morrow morning, I ought to be back by Friday night or Saturday morning. But what on earth will you do with yourself?"

"I don't know, but I can't go back there. You don't know how impossible it is."

"But after we are married?"

"Perhaps it will be different then," she answered musingly.

He drew her to the sofa, and putting both arms round her, began with infinite tenderness:

"Lilly, darling, what is it? Tell me. Is it that

you don't care for me as you did? What is it? Tell me, little woman. Oh! I can't bear the thought of leaving you here all alone by yourself."

"Maurice, I don't know what it is. Only I feel very miserable. Everything seems in such a tangle. I feel as if something strange were going to happen to me. I want to think about lots of things. That's why I want to be alone, quite alone."

VIII

Eight o'clock had just struck; a continuous hum resounded through the restaurant, a Babel of voices and a clatter of knives and forks.

"I do love the crowd, the bustle, and all that," exclaimed Lilly, excitedly.

Then,

"Oh! Maurice, who's that? I'm sure he knows you; look!"

Against the pillar in the centre of the room a powerfully built, dark-faced man was leaning. His face, in contrast to the whiteness of his shirt-front, seemed copper-coloured, and there was a singular

massiveness about it; bushy eyebrows, heavy, black moustache and vermilion lips.

Dominating the whole room, he stood leisurely casting his eyes over the crowd of diners.

"That man by the pillar?" answered Maurice. "Yes, I know him a little. His name is Adrian Safford. Some more soup?" And he went on with his dinner.

Safford's eyes were on them now, travelling from one to the other with a deliberateness that was almost insolent.

Lilly's eyelids dropped; she hurriedly crumbled a piece of bread.

But the temptation was irresistible; nervously she glanced up. Quite close now, his back towards her, both hands in his pockets, and a crush hat tucked under one arm.

"Maurice, he can't find a seat."

"Can't find a seat—who can't?"

"That big man—Mr. Safford. Tell him that there's room next you."

In the glass opposite she could see the reflection of his face. As she spoke he made a sudden, half-

arrested movement of his head. He had overheard.

Maurice touched him on the shoulder. And, as shaking hands they exchanged greetings, Lilly noticed the prickliness of his eyebrows, and the strong muscles on each side of the bull-like throat.

And Maurice introduced him to her; under the stare from his lustrous black eyes she flushed hotly.

He was speaking, his voice sounded slow, drawling almost.

But she scarcely heard what he was saying, she was watching his hands, as they smoothed the cloth in front of him—white and fat, tipped with pink finger-nails, carefully trimmed to a point.

IX

All the morning and during luncheon Maurice had been gloomily taciturn; this had induced in Lilly a strained, nervous gaiety.

The moment of parting drew near and the tension became more and more painful.

Yet it did not snap till they were slowly pacing the platform before the departure of the train. Then, of a sudden, he turned his face, contorted as in acute physical pain, and with a dryness in his voice, passionately implored her to return.

But he did not touch her. Strange that she was observing him, curiously, for the first time conscious of distinct antipathy towards him. He looked—yes, ridiculous, as if ashamed of having betrayed his emotion. The sight of this emotion sent a spasm of irritation through her. Next she felt an almost uncontrollable inclination to laugh.

But he did not press her any longer, for he dimly saw how it was. The porters began to slam the doors ; in silence he entered the train.

After it had gone she sauntered about the streets, staring at the people, reading the posters on the hoardings, gazing into the shop windows, now and then buying with the money he had given her little objects that took her fancy.

At last, hot and dusty, she found herself back at the hotel. Tired out, she stretched herself on the

sofa, and, closing her eyes, let thoughts float aimlessly across her brain.

There passed visions of a woman with yellow hair indolently reclining against the cushions of a victoria; of the red-bearded policeman who had told her the way to the hotel; of the stare of a thin man in frock coat pinched at the waist; of the gold-spotted veil, and of the brooch set in imitation pearls, which she had carried home with her.

Then the bronzed countenance of Safford, his bright, red lips, and fat, white hands appeared as he leant against the central pillar of the restaurant.

And now Maurice was there too. Side by side they disputed for her. Maurice troubled, with tears in his eyes; Safford still, massive as a statue.

"Which loves her best?" cried the crowd.

"I do," answered his slow tones. He encircled her cheeks with his hands, which were soft and warm, and his bright, red lips kissed her softly on the eyes.

X

Abruptly, without effort, her eyes opened. And immediately their gaze fell upon Safford. For an instant, the impression of her dream remained vivid; to see him there seemed natural. But before the returning sense of reality, it faded quickly; bewilderment sweeping in, arrested all thought.

Astride of a chair, the broad expanse of his back blocking the light, he sat, looking out of the window, apparently absorbed in the street below. This unconcernedness alarmed her.

How did he come there?

A minute or two slipped by, then he shifted his chair, as if to rise. Her eyes shut hastily, involuntarily; she pretended to be asleep. He came to her, so close that his breath played on her cheek, but in spite of the loud throbbing of her heart, she never stirred. He moved away: his heavy tread sounded about the room. Then silence.

Had he gone? No, she would have heard the

click of the door-handle. The darkness, the suspense became intolerable, yet it was a full minute before she could summon courage to reopen her eyes.

Her gaze met his.

"I say, if I couldn't sham better than that, I wouldn't try at all," and his broad teeth gleamed.

Somehow his voice calmed her. His self-possession communicated itself to her, giving her confidence.

"I wasn't shamming."

"I could see it."

"How?"

"Your eyes were trembling."

She smiled, almost frankly.

"Weren't you surprised to see me?"

"Yes, no—I mean yes."

"Where's Radford?"

"Maurice? He's gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"To Guildford."

"And you're here all alone?"

She nodded.

A moment's pause—he thoughtfully jingling some money in his trouser-pocket; she, wondering that he looked so much darker than he had done in evening dress.

"When is he coming back?"

"I'm not sure, either to-morrow night or Saturday morning.

Another pause.

"What did you do last night—after I went away?"

"We went to the theatre."

"Did you like it?"

"Yes, awfully."

"You're fond of the theatre?"

"I've only been twice—in London at least."

"Would you like to go again to-night?"

"I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Maurice—I promised him."

"What a pity! You'd have liked it."

"Yes, I should."

"Look here, it will be all right; he won't mind, he knows me well enough." And again the broad teeth gleamed.

"I don't know—perhaps——"

But as she spoke, his soft, warm hands encircled her face, his bright, red lips kissed her on the eyes, just as in her dream.

The blood rushed to her face, in hot gasps her breath came and went, everything but Safford swam in a mist and was gone; impulsively she lifted her burning face to his and murmured:

"Tell me that you love me. Then I'll come."

XI

Adrian Safford's chambers were sombre; even on this summer morning shadows lurked in the corners of the lofty spacious room. There was no window; the light struggled in as best it could, through a ground glass skylight. On the walls, maroon-coloured hangings; from the fireplace to the ceiling reached a huge overmantel of black, carved oak. The rich scent of a burning pastille struck a note of sensuous mystery. It was all curiously characteristic of the man.

Amid the dark tints, a single patch of colour—

the white table-cloth on which an exquisitely fresh breakfast was laid. Safford had just seated himself before it, a scowl deepening the bronze of his face. Yet he ate in a vigorous, business-like way. His appetite was always splendidly regular.

The girl asleep in the next room was the cause of his scowl.

Something about the crispness of her hair; something about the modelling of her chin; something in the questioning look that darted out from the liquidness of her big eyes; something—he knew not what—had haunted him, ever since their first meeting. A spark of caprice fanned into fitful flame by the offensiveness of Radford's ill-concealed pride of possession.

And so the day before yesterday he had gone to the hotel. To find her alone was more than he had hoped for, but directly he saw her lying asleep on the sofa, he knew instinctively that she was his. Women were so easy.

The rest had been the old story, only this time more commonplace than ever—a dinner at the

Café Royal, a box at the Empire, and back to his chambers afterwards. And yet she was different from the others: she remained: he kept her for her monstrous freshness.

He had asked nothing about her relations with Radford. He had made a rule never to question them about themselves: the tedious monotony of their stories bored him immensely.

It was she who, in her wildness, had blurted it all out. He saw it coming and did his best to stop her. But it was not to be. And when he heard that she and Radford were to have been married in a day or two, his feeling was one of pure disgust—not disgust at her treachery, but disgust at the blunder he had committed—blunder ahead of which he foresaw a whole series of unpleasant complications.

And in that instant he tired of her—her passion, from being a thing to be toyed with complacently, suddenly filled him with active dislike. The very searching gaze which had amused him before now seemed merely stupid. With the exasperation of a trapped animal, he realised that she was one of

the clinging sort, whose dismissal was generally difficult, always disagreeable.

"Damn," he muttered, savagely biting the end of a cigar.

XII

Safford, his huge frame stretched on two chairs, from time to time carefully inserted the cigar between his teeth. He smoked thoughtfully, deliberately, yet the cigar had nearly burnt to an end before Lilly ran in, with the fresh morning bloom upon her.

"Why, how late! Ten o'clock," she cried. "And you've eaten nearly all the breakfast. For shame! I believe that's why you got up without waking me."

"There's some left under the cover. Ring for more if it's cold," he answered, without removing the cigar from his mouth.

But she, in her radiant unconsciousness, did not notice his gloom.

"Do come and cut this bread for me," she called out presently, "it hurts my fingers, it's so awfully

hard." He did as she asked; then flicking the ash from his cigar, stood looking down at her as she ate.

"Sugar, please. I say, what shall we do to-day? It's so splendid out. I can't stop inside. Besides, it's so stuffy in here. Safford shifted his feet uneasily. "I tell you what—I know. We'll go down to Kingston and go on the river. It's awfully jolly down there. I went once last summer."

"With Radford, I suppose?"

"Why, I believe you're jealous of him—yes, you are, else you wouldn't look so solemn. Come, aren't you?"

No answer.

She rose, and both hands toying with the lapels of his coat, said hurriedly:

"But I don't care for him—not a bit. He seems like a stranger now. It seems months since I saw him. I love you—oh! I can never tell you how I love you. I want to be with you always—you know I do. Come kiss, kiss me again like the first time." Her voice, though rapid, had great earnestness in it.

With an impatient movement he repulsed her.

"You must go back this morning," he said, more brutally than he had intended, but his exasperation had got the better of him. "When I sent for your things yesterday, they said he would return this morning."

She stepped back, as if he had struck her; the light went out of her face; her eyes blinked quickly as she tried to grasp his meaning, her under-lip began to twitch.

"You're joking! Oh! don't! Say it's a joke! You don't know how it hurts!"

"No, I'm quite serious. Now be sensible and listen. I should never have brought you here if I'd known about you and him. You must go back —at once."

"You really mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it."

"Then you don't love me any more," she burst out. "I don't believe you ever did. It was only just to amuse yourself that you brought me here. You made me love you, and now that you've had enough of me you want to send me back to him. You——"

Unheeding, he went on slowly:

"Besides, I'm going away."

"It's a lie! You only want to get rid of me."

"Do as I tell you, and don't make a fuss." There was an imperiousness in his voice that cowed her. The passionate fierceness left her. "And if you are careful," he went on, "it will be all right; not a soul knows where you've been. Very likely he won't find out that you've been away. And even if he does, he's quite fool enough"—and with a grim smile at the words that were rising to his lips, he checked himself.

But she did not hear what he was saying. Like some nightmare procession, the incidents in her life since her departure from Guildford were passing before her.

"I sha'n't tell any lies. I shall tell him straight out," she said half to herself.

Impatiently he shrugged his shoulders.

"And then, when I've told him, I may come back, mayn't I?"

"Come back? Here?"

"Yes, when it's all over with him. I mean when he's gone away again."

"It's quite impossible. Just understand that."

"But what am I to do, then?" It was the cry of concentrated despair.

"You've got to do what I've told you. It will be all right. I know what I'm talking about. If you don't choose to—well, then, it's your lookout. You can't come back here, that's certain. I'm going away."

She was not looking at him; her big eyes, wide-open, were staring vacantly at something beyond.

"Where are you going?" she said faintly, after a pause.

"Never mind. Nowhere where you can come."

"Oh! for God's sake, don't send me away." The vacant expression had given way to the feverish pleading of her childish passion. "You will kill me if you do. Can't you see how I love you. There seems to be nothing else in the world for me but you. Perhaps you think that I shall be in the way. But I promise you that I will do whatever you tell me; I will be no trouble; I will not speak

to you if you do not want me to—I will do anything." And down streamed the tears.

"Poor little devil," he muttered under his breath.

He drew her towards him and her frail body shook convulsively on his chest.

"Lilly, dear, you must go, you really must. It's for your own good. There are lots of reasons why you must, that you don't understand—you will soon forget all about this. Now come, kiss me, and say you will go quietly."

Her sobbing had ceased. His slow tones had mastered her.

She looked up through her tears and nodded. "I will go," she said through her teeth, "because I can't help doing what you tell me. But I shall come back."

So absorbing was his sense of relief that he did not hear her last words.

"Make haste and get your hat. I'll see you into a hansom. I'll get your things packed and sent after you at once. And remember all that I told you. You've only got to play your cards well, and it will be all right."

So fearful was he lest she should resent her submission, that the unnatural calm which had come over her passed unnoticed.

XIII

"Lieutenant Radford has just come back; he was asking for you just now ma'am," said a waiter as she mounted the staircase.

Pushing past him, she laid her hand on the door of the room. As she did so, it opened suddenly from within, and a man, whom she recognised as the manager of the hotel, held it open for her to pass.

Maurice was seated at the table, writing.

"Lilly," he cried as she entered. "Thank God!"

Wildly he poured kisses on her hair and face She submitted passively, quite white, her teeth set, in her eyes a stony stare.

The first rush of emotion passed, he let her go.

"But where have you been?"

She made no answer, only a dangerous light—a light that boded mischief—suddenly animated

her face. He was so different from him whom she had just left. And, as she recalled Safford's massive frame and bronzed countenance, she found herself looking at Maurice, critically, as at some stranger, each detail of whose person was acutely repulsive. But for him Safford would never have sent her away. She hated him for it.

"Lilly, they tell me that you've been away since Thursday. What have you been doing?"

She had expected anger; but there was none in his voice, only a tone of tender entreaty that made her wince. An irresistible, evil desire to wound him came to her.

"I've been with Adrian."

"Adrian? Who? Safford?"

"Good God!" and as the truth dawned on him, with a gradual, ugly contraction, his face turned a greyish colour.

Sinking into a chair, he buried his head in his hands.

Some minutes passed, but he did not stir. The silence soon became intolerable to Lilly; fiercely she fidgeted with her glove, pulling at a button, trying to wrench it off.

At last she could bear it no longer. She spoke, and as she did so, the sound of her own voice startled her.

"Have you anything more to say to me?"

He looked up, tears were in his eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going if you haven't anything more to say."

"Going? Where?"

"Back. I only came to tell you."

In supreme unconsciousness of his suffering, she spoke quite naturally, as if the matter was of no consequence.

His lips moved, but he uttered no words, only a choking, gurgling sound.

Again dropping his head in his hands, he sobbed audibly.

The sobs rose, and fell regularly, harshly. It was the first time that she had seen a man cry. And an element of contempt entered into her bitterness.

Then for one short moment she pitied him. Vaguely, as one pities an animal in pain.

She stepped forward, as if to say something, but almost immediately the impulse died away. She went quickly out through the door, closing it softly behind her.

And Maurice, blinded by his grief, did not know that she was gone.

XIV

Lilly was now alone. Maurice and she had parted—probably for ever. And Safford had disappeared. They had told her at his chambers that he was gone. At first she believed that they were lying, and obstinately waited for him during long hours. But it was in vain. Then she searched for him in the streets, wandering hither and thither in the hope of meeting him. But amid the crowd there were no signs of his massive frame.

So for several days. And then the seething turmoil of the great city, ruthless in its never-flagging lust, caught up the frailty of her helpless beauty, and playing with it, marred it, mutilated it. Like a flower, frost-bitten in the hour of its budding, she drooped and withered.

Against the inevitable she made no continuous resistance. How could she? Only for a while; with the feeble struggles of a drowning creature she clung to the memory of her great love for Safford, and to every little thing that reminded her of it.

First, it was a dark-faced foreigner about Safford's build and height. He was kind to her—at least he treated her with no selfish brutality—and listened indulgently when she opened her heart to him. As he listened she would feverishly strive to delude herself into believing that he was the lover she had lost. But even this consolation of self-deception was denied her.

After a while, she somehow lost sight of him, and then it was any one who by some detail of his person recalled Safford to her—a drawling voice heard one night in a restaurant; two prickly eyebrows caught sight of one night under a lamp-post in Piccadilly; a red and black necktie like the one he wore the afternoon that he had come to the hotel.

Fierce, fitful loves, prompted by curious twistings of caprice, born to die within an hour or two.

She grew careless of her dress and of her person, and at last callous to all around her. She sunk into the irretrievable morass of impersonal prostitution. She ceased to live; mechanically she trudged on across the swamp-level of existence.

One evening, before starting out, as she dragged through the ceremony of her toilet, wearily staring in her glass, there flashed across her murky brain a resemblance between her own wasted, discoloured face, and the hard angularity of Aunt Lisbet's features.

After that the recollections of her girlhood—Aunt Lisbet, Maurice and even Safford faded into the twilight of the past. With no common speed, the end was drawing near.

XV

Pain beyond a certain degree of intensity ceases to be pain. Thus it was with Maurice. In a state of mental numbness he went back to Guildford. His mind, stunned as it was, could only feebly revolve about these words of Lilly's: "I'm going

back to him. I only came to tell you." All else was blurred; this alone, and the vision of her white, set face, and stony stare stood out distinct and sharp.

It was many days before consciousness began to return, before his thoughts, emerging from their torpor, started to explore the extent of his pain.

But when the awakening came, with a morbid craving for self-inflicted torture, he lingered over every detail; starting from the very beginning, he lived once again through the events of the last three months.

Now and then, the memory of some happy day they had spent together would come back so vividly as to drive away the dull pain, but it was only for an instant. With a quiver like that caused by the turning of a knife in an old wound, he heard the words ringing once more in his ears: "I'm going back to him. I only came to tell you."

And yet, realising the grim hideousness of it, he felt no resentment against her.

Of a sudden, an infinite pity for her filled him. From that moment all was changed. His love for

her, which had lived on in spite of it all, and the new-born pity, each nourishing the other, lessened the sense of his pain, lifting him above it.

For the first time the mechanism of her nature was laid bare before him. He saw many things that he had never heeded before, passing them over as of no significance, things that now, with curious intuition, he understood.

And the exaltation of his love and of his pity rose.

The tragedy was no longer his, but hers. It was not his life that was spoilt, but hers. Pitilessly he upbraided himself—to have left her in the hands of a brute like Safford (the very thought of the man's swarthy skin made his blood boil)—Lilly—his Lilly—who was to have been his wife. How had he ever done it? How contemptible, what a weak creature he was! Poor little child!

And the exaltation of his love and his pity rose still higher.

Yes, he must save her. It was not too late. All the fine elements in his nature forced their way to the front in support of this resolve.

This resolve was the outcome of no blind impulse; he knew to the full the extent of the sacrifice he was about to make. His eyes were opened; he had counted the cost, but he never wavered.

On the contrary, the very sense of her unfitness to be his wife only strengthened his determination to do what was right.

XVI

A small servant-girl, slatternly in her dress, led the way up some narrow stairs, and Maurice stumbled once or twice, catching his feet in the torn stair-carpet, which was colourless with dirt.

"This is the room," she said, and he followed her in.

The first thing that struck him was its shameless disorder—on the table, in the centre, a great litter of old newspapers; some tattered, yellow-backed novels; a half-finished cup of tea, stale and greasy; the remains of a cake, with crumbs scattered on the floor; a packet of cigarettes, two almost empty glasses. There were only three chairs, and on each some article of clothing had been thrown, a

bonnet, a petticoat, or a pair of stockings. On the mantelpiece lay a bunch of withered roses, and opposite the mantelpiece stretched a curtain which evidently divided off the bedroom.

Presently a voice—her voice, just the same as in the old days—called out from behind the curtain.

"Who's there?"

"It's some one to see you," answered the servant-girl.

"All right. I'll be out in a minute."

A sound of splashing water, and the strained humming of a music-hall song.

"I say, who are you?" she called out.

He did not answer.

"Speak up, don't be shy. You're Dick? Ned Chalmers, then? Eh? Well, I give it up. Just wait till I've brushed my hair a bit, and I'll come and see for myself."

At each fresh word revealing the extent of her downfall, he winced.

But his resolve was as strong as ever.

The curtain moved. In a gaudy, pink dressing-gown, stained and torn, she stood before him.

Lilly, and yet not Lilly—like, but different with a difference that chilled him.

At the sight of him, her whole body stiffened in astonishment.

"Maurice!" she gasped.

Face to face they stood, looking into each other's eyes, "Lilly," he heard himself saying at last, "come away." He could find no other words, so imperious was the desire to remove her immediately out of these loathsome surroundings.

"Come away," he repeated, "away from all this."

"Yes, it is rather messy," she assented, looking round the room with a forced smile. "But I'll get the girl to tidy up a bit. Sit down, chuck those things on to the floor. How it took me aback seeing you all of a sudden like that! Fancy your finding me out. I never expected to see you again. I thought you had forgotten all about me." (She spoke hurriedly to conceal her agitation.) "Just look at this table, did you ever see such a beastly mess? The people here never think of cleaning out the room."

"Lilly," he heard himself saying again, "you must come away with me at once. You shall make a fresh start with me. I will marry you, and together we will forget all this awful time."

"You're quite serious?" she asked slowly. "You want to marry me now—after all that has happened?"

"Yes," he answered steadily, yet with the absolute futility of it quite clear before him.

"Well, you're more curious than I thought you were," was all her reply.

"What have you been doing all this time?" she added presently.

"I've been back at Guildford. But you must come away from here first. I can't talk things over with you in this horrible place."

"All right, I'll come if you like. But it's no good."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean about your marrying me. I could never marry a man I didn't care for."

He took a full minute to grasp her meaning. The possibility of this had never crossed his mind.

"But you can't go on like this." He was so staggered that words failed him. "Do you know what the life you're leading means? Don't you see how it must all end?"

"Oh! I know all that as well as you do. You don't suppose I find it so extra pleasant, do you?" she burst out bitterly. "But they say it won't last long; that's one comfort. I'm done for, and the sooner it's over the better."

Her voice was hard and reckless.

"For Heaven's sake don't talk like that."

"Look here," she interrupted almost fiercely. "It's no good your going on about it. I could never marry a man I didn't love. And I don't love you. I thought I did once. But it was all different then."

"Is there any one else then?"

"Any one else," and there was a savageness in her voice as she caught up his words. "They're just a lot of beasts, the whole lot of them. And if you go on talking about it you'll make me just mad —yes, they're all beasts—I hate them—every one of them, and the sooner it's all over the better.

Have a cigarette, there's some on the table. For God's sake do something, say something; don't stand staring at me like that—you've seen me often enough. I'm a precious fright, I know. But how's a girl to keep her looks in this hell of a life?"

"But it's not too late to mend it all."

"Oh! don't go on saying that over and over again. Just get the idea out of your head, once and for all. That's my last word."

And he saw that she meant it. Somehow an immense relief that it was not to be came to him and struggled with his pity for her.

"At least give up this life. Here's some money. Go away somewhere, where you can make a fresh start."

She took the sovereigns from his hand, quickly, with an angry movement as if to fling them on the floor. But, instead, she poured them into a china box on the mantelpiece.

"I'll see about it," she answered.

But he saw the deceit written on her face, and he could bear the strain no longer. An

irresistible longing to escape from the stifling atmosphere of the room, to be once more in the street, swept over him.

And as he groped his way down the dirty staircase he felt physically sick.

XVII

The next day Maurice went back to her lodgings.

She was gone, leaving no address behind. He set to work to trace her, and found her at last, late one rainy night, in the Charing Cross Road, but she passed by without recognising him.

And when he entreated her, she was sullenly obdurate.

In despair he went back to his regiment.

For some time more she was seen at intervals in a little public-house at the back of Regent Street. Then she disappeared. What had become of her, no one knew and no one cared.

Maurice alone remembered her, but he never saw her again.

A CONFLICT OF EGOISMS

I

THE sun must have gone down some time ago, for the room was darkening rapidly. Still Oswald Nowell went on writing, covering page after page with a bold, irregular scrawl. Since breakfast he had been there, and large sheets of paper littered the table and the floor around it. In front of him, by the inkstand, was a plate filled with half-burnt cigarettes.

Of a sudden he became aware that the light was very bad ; so he laid down his pen, rose and paced up and down impatiently, his canvas shirt unbuttoned at the throat, his coat discoloured, and worn quite threadbare at the elbows, his thin, grey hair dishevelled as after a sleepless night ; his eyes with the dull look of brain exhaustion in them.

had never recovered. But it was not so. In the interminable day-dreams, which had filled so many hours of his life, no woman's image had ever long occupied a place. It was the sex, abstract and generalised, that appealed to him ; for he lived as it were too far off to distinguish particular members. In like manner, his whole view of human nature was a generalised, abstract view: he saw no detail, only the broad lights and shades. And, since he started with no preconceived ideas or prejudices concerning the people with whom he came in contact, he accepted them as he found them, absolutely; and this, coupled with the effects of his solitary habits, gave him a supreme tolerance—the tolerance of indifference. This indifference lent a background of strength to his artistic personality. It was for this reason perhaps, and also because no one knew much about him, that every one spoke of him with respect.

Just now his power of work was exhausted : stretching himself on a sofa and shutting his eyes, he loosened the tension which was causing his brain to ache. His thoughts, as if astonished at

their sudden liberation, for a minute or two flitted about aimlessly; then sank to rest as he fell into a dull slumber.

II

Below, in a tiny sitting-room, daintily, but inexpensively furnished, a woman, broad-shouldered and large-limbed, was stirring a cup of tea, with the unconstraint of habitual solitude. She sat facing the light, which exposed the faint wrinkle-marks about the eyes and mouth and made her seem several years older than she probably was; and these, coupled with the absence of colour in her cheeks, gave to the whole face a worn look, as if the effort of living had for her been no slight one.

And so indeed it was.

Eight of the best years of her life had slipped away in a hard-fought, all-absorbing struggle for independence. At last, a year and a half ago, it had come, and ever since, the emotional side of her nature, hitherto cramped and undeveloped, had been expanding with a passionateness that was almost painful.

Her childhood and her girlhood till she was nineteen, had been spent with her father, who was sub-editor of a halfpenny evening daily—a joyless, homeless existence, moving from boarding-house to boarding-house. Then one dirty November evening brought the first turning-point in her life. An omnibus knocked down her father as he was crossing the Strand, and the wheels passed over his chest. Death was quite instantaneous. Letty gave way to no explosion of grief, only she uttered a little gasp of horror at the sight of the distorted, dead face.

She had never cared for her father, the outbreaks of whose almost uncontrollable temper were the only dark incidents that relieved the dreariness of her colourless memories; and she had never learnt to pretend what she did not feel.

Old Stephen Moore, thriftless and dissolute all his life, left behind him nothing but a month's unpaid salary.

A couple of days after the funeral, she appeared at the office, and doggedly demanded to be given something to do. The manager peered suspiciously

through his glasses at this gawky, overgrown girl and put one or two questions to her. Her apparent friendlessness and her determined spirit touched him; he promised to see what could be done.

The next day, and every day for the following six years, she spent in and out of the narrow, grimy building in Fleet Street, doing all manner of odd jobs, carrying messages, copying and answering letters, after awhile working up paragraphs and even writing leaderettes. Into whatever she was set to do, she threw her whole soul, always bright-faced and quick of intelligence, always eager to learn. And three or four times her salary was raised.

Then the sub-editorship of a ladies weekly was offered her. She accepted it eagerly, for, though it meant but a little more money, there seemed good prospect of promotion. Here, as before, she was indefatigable. Two years later the editor died; the post was at once given to her.

The new sense of authority and of responsibility was a source of great pleasure to her; she liked to recall the old Fleet Street days, when she was at

every one's beck and call, to remind herself that no one had helped her, that her exertions alone had done it all. This thought repeated itself constantly, never failing to send through her a warm thrill of self-satisfaction. Hitherto she had had no desire, no interest outside her work; in complete unconsciousness of self, in complete ignorance of her own emotional possibilities, she had lived on, day after day.

Little by little, she began to realise herself in her relation to the corner of the world in which she mixed; insensibly to compare herself with others; dimly to perceive that life had perhaps many things in store for her, that were not included in the daily routine of work. And this process of awakening, once begun, proceeded with a curious rapidity.

Formerly she had always spent the couple of hours between her dinner and bed-time typewriting or doing other light work, making or mending her own clothes.

Now the necessity for this was gone, and at first she found the filling of the daily gap by no means easy, for she had never learnt how to be idle. She

could, of course, have found plenty of work for herself in connection with the paper, but when she thought of it, she became aware that somehow the idea was distasteful. In reality an undefinable but growing longing for something—what she knew not—was unsettling her.

One evening the dinginess of her lodgings struck her, and from that moment she took a violent dislike to them. A week later she moved into the rooms she now occupied, half-way up the pile of flats overlooking the river.

The choosing of the furniture gave her a fortnight of excitement, for she set about it, as she set about everything, with an intense seriousness.

Next followed a period of restless arranging and rearranging; directly the dinner was cleared away, hammering in nails and wrenching them out again, pushing chairs and tables from one corner of the room to another, the whole accompanied by protracted consultations with the newly engaged servant-girl.

Sometimes on her way back from the office, it would occur to her that the looking-glass ought to

be hung higher or lower, or that the table-cloth on the square table would look better on the round one; hastening home, and without waiting to take off her hat and gloves, she would at once try the effect of the alteration.

And, when everything was done, the clean, new chintzes, the stiff, white muslin curtains, the Japanese fans, and the hundred and one other bright-coloured knick-knacks on the walls, all, instead of delighting her, as she had expected, made her feel awkward and ill at ease. Her well-worn work-a-day clothes seemed out of place in this new interior, which made their deficiencies appear all the more glaring. In her daily work she had of necessity acquired a considerable knowledge of the fashions, but to use that knowledge for the adornment of herself had never occurred to her before.

The new elegancies in her dress led her to self-admiration, and to the delicious discovery of her own beauty. It came one afternoon, through a glimpse caught of the reflection of her own profile in a shop window. She stopped, turned and passed before it five or six times, examining herself anxiously.

Then, as she walked on homewards, she found herself eagerly comparing her own appearance, which remained clearly visualised, with that of the passers-by.

About this time, too, she became infected with a passion for reading—chiefly inferior, sentimental novels. A considerable number of these were sent each week to the office for review. One afternoon, when things were slack, she happened to open one of these volumes that was lying on her table. Before long her attention was absorbed, and, in the evening, she carried the book home with her. All through her dinner, and on till nearly twelve o'clock, she pored over it, till the three volumes were finished.

The habit, once set going, rapidly ate its way into her life, so that, soon, she never sat down to a meal without a novel before her. And directly one book was finished, she would start on another; hence she remembered scarcely anything of what they contained, but their incidents, piled up and jumbled together in her mind, inflamed her imagination and brought on inexplicable fits of dissatis-

faction and depression. Her thoughts took to dwelling on man's love; vaguely she marvelled that it had always been divorced from her life, that no one had ever whispered softly to her, "Letty, darling, I love you."

But surely one day, now that she was well dressed and smart—yes, it seemed that it must be, when she thought of the others, dull and ugly, who were married. And the care with which she dressed herself each morning was for the sake of this unknown new-comer, for whom she was waiting with vague expectation.

This evening however, as she sat over her half-finished cup of tea, her expression—sensitive reflection of all that was passing in her mind—started to fluctuate from radiancy to perplexity, from perplexity to despair.

III

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but may I offer you half of my umbrella? It's not quite so bad now."

The shower had been a fierce one covering the

roadway with a thick crop of rain spikes, filling the gutters with rushing rivulets of muddy water; now, through a rift in the ink-coloured clouds, the sunlight was filtering feebly, and the swirl of the downpour had subsided to a gentle patter.

Under a doorway they stood, side by side. Having no umbrella, she had fled there for shelter, when the shower had overtaken her on her way home from the office. And as soon as she had recovered her breath, she saw that he was there too, leaning against the wall, staring absently before him, puffing at a short pipe, his hat pulled over his eyes, his clothes hanging loosely about his large frame. She knew him well by sight from having passed him often on the stairs of the flat; but they had never exchanged a word.

When she had first learnt who he was, she had bought his books, and had set about reading them, not as she usually read, but attentively, almost religiously, because the fact that she was constantly meeting him, and that he lived overhead, gave her an almost personal interest in them. And hence, though there was much in them that she did

not understand, they remained distinct in her memory.

She encouraged her servant to repeat to her all sort of gossip about the inmates of the flats, and in this way she learnt much concerning him. And all that she so learnt, coupled with his picturesque appearance, only set her imagination working the more. So that, insensibly, she slipped into the habit of thinking a great deal about him.

As he spoke, she flushed under her veil, and endeavoured by an anxious scrutiny of the sky to disguise her nervousness.

"Thank you," she answered. "Thank you very much; but I think it would be better to wait a few minutes longer. It looks, over there, as if it were going to quite stop."

Two or three minutes passed. She was waiting for him to speak; but he said nothing. She was growing angry with herself for not having gone with him at once: the silence oppressed her. A dozen different ways of breaking it passed through her mind, but she rejected them all as soon as they occurred to her. Why did he not say something?

She glanced at him—back in the listless attitude, gazing vacantly across the street; the sight of this unconsciousness considerably relieved her embarrassment.

Presently he seemed to become aware that she was looking at him; rousing himself, he took the pipe from his mouth and said:

"I think you should be getting home; you ought not to stand here in your wet clothes." He spoke easily, with a quiet familiarity, as if he had known her for a long time.

They started out together: quite slowly, for in order to keep herself out of the rain, she was obliged to accommodate herself to his pace. And as they strolled along through the drizzle, he clumsily pecked at her hat from time to time with the points of his umbrella. She longed to ask him to walk quicker, or to let her hold the umbrella; but she dared not, on account of his self-possession. He was talking leisurely, questioning her about herself, about her life, with a directness that would have been presumptuous but for the half-disguised indifference of his tone. Then gradually the uncom-

fortable edge of the strangeness wore off and his calm communicated itself to her.

She was not listening attentively to what he was saying; she was thinking about him as the author of his books, vaguely wondering that he did not talk as she had expected him to talk.

There was a pause; he had done speaking and she had nothing to answer.

Suddenly, almost with surprise, she found herself saying:

"I've read your books." And immediately she felt a sense of relief flowing through her, as if the weight of some heavy thing had been all at once removed.

He started and answered with a change of tone:

"Which ones?"

"All of them."

For the first time he seemed embarrassed, uncertain what to say. Surprised at his silence, she looked, and saw that his lips were moving hesitatingly; but he said nothing. Then a crash, just behind her—a heavy dray-horse fell, and lay help-

lessly floundering on the slimy pavement. They turned and stood watching its vain efforts to rise.

"What a shame not to put down some sand!" she exclaimed.

But he answered:

"Did you like the last—'Kismet'?"

Smiling a little at the irrelevancy of his question, she answered him at first with trite, meaningless phrases; but as she tried to explain how it had affected her, she found herself talking as she had never talked before, as it were inventing ideas that sounded astonishingly clever and well expressed. And, one after another, they rose to her lips.

She was unconsciously charmed by this new pleasure of listening to her own talk; oblivious of all else, she walked on by his side, till the sight of the familiar, red-brick doorway abruptly brought back the sense of reality.

"Good-bye," she said hurriedly. "Thank you so much. I hope,"—she wanted to apologise for her outburst of garrulity—she wanted to express a hope that he would come to see her—to tea some afternoon; but somehow she did neither, and

without finishing her sentence, mounted the stairs. He waited till she was gone; then filling his pipe again, lit it, and went out slowly, his large figure growing more and more indistinct as it receded down the brown pavement.

The rain was over: the countless little streams that trickled down the roadway gleamed yellow in the sunlight.

IV

On the morrow, as Letty, hastening homewards, approached the spot in the Strand where she had met him yesterday, she became aware of a thrill of expectation; for she was half counting on seeing him leaning against the doorway, his hat pulled over his eyes, his short pipe in the corner of his mouth. She even stopped and looked about her. But the crowd flowed thick on the pavement; there was no sign of him. And, since he was not there, just as she had imagined he would be, her expectation died away, her thoughts drifting to other things.

And so till she was home; then, by the entrance

to the flats, she caught sight of him—how she liked the loose way his coat hung from his shoulders!

"Won't you come up and have some tea?" she said nervously.

"Thank you," he answered, and they mounted the stairs together.

She had been scheming the evening before, as she lay awake in bed, how she should get him to come to tea with her; she had imagined him sitting in her armchair, consulting her about his books, or admiring her yellow silk curtains and the plush hangings behind the door. But with their entry into the room, a constraint seemed to come over both of them. Without even glancing around him, he sat down and drank his tea, awkwardly, obviously not accustomed to holding his cup in his hand. And when he spoke—and he said but little—it was with a slight stammer that she had not noticed before. She, too, was ill at ease: it had been easy enough to talk to him in the street, now she could think of nothing to say. And more and more keenly she resented her disappointment, growing quite indignant with him because it was all so different from what she

had expected. So that, when at last he rose to go it was almost a relief, and her petulance was scarcely concealed. And he, noticing her change of manner, gave her a look half-puzzled, half-pained.

* * * * *

During the week that followed, she met him almost every day on her way home: each time it was in the same, absent, almost casual manner that he accosted her. But she knew that he came out expressly to meet her. All day, as she went about her work in her little room at the office, she would look forward to the walk home by his side; in the evening she would sit, as it were, living every incident of it over again. Beyond his books they had found no common interest, so they talked of little else; but this alone seemed to her full of possibilities, indefinable but endless.

One evening she was sorting a bundle of letters she had brought home from the office, when her servant opened the door and he walked in.

"I can't get on with that chapter; I want to talk to you," he said abruptly.

She saw the yellow look on his face; she noticed, too, that his shirt was unbuttoned at the throat, and that there were inkstains on his fingers; it was as if he had risen from his writing-table and had come straight down to her.

"I can't get on with it at all," he repeated, half to himself.

There was something in this appeal which, outside her own personal feeling for him, went straight to her heart, and put her quite at her ease.

He began to talk, walking up and down the room, and, in a minute or two, she perceived that he had forgotten all about her. For he was not talking to her, but to himself, thinking aloud; now blurting out headless, tailless phrases, now breaking into long, rhythmical sentences which he recapitulated and corrected as he went along. She was listening, a little impatiently, waiting till he should stop, anxious to turn the conversation. But when at last there was a pause, it seemed impossible for her to break the silence with any other topic, so impregnated did the very air of the room seem with his words.

"And after that, what happens?" she asked, not really wanting to know, but only to hear him speak again.

He gave her a sudden glance, as if surprised that she should have overheard him; then, picking up the thread of his thought, continued as before.

Presently he stopped abruptly, just in front of her.

"Good-night."

She held out her hand: he took it in both of his.

"Good night," he repeated absently, "things are much clearer now."

"Then I have really helped you?" Her eyes fell on her hand which he still held, and she flushed a little, drawing it away. But he never noticed her movement: he was staring straight in front of him.

"Yes, things are much clearer. I think I'll go up and put them on paper. I'm afraid I've disturbed you," he added, glancing at the papers on the table. "It was good of you to listen to me for so long." And with his hand on the door he

continued: "It is all well marked out in my mind now."

She stood listening to his footsteps, as they died away up the staircase. Then glancing down at her right hand, as it hung by her side, she flushed again, more deeply this time, and moved almost impatiently to the chair by the table. She took up the paper again, but it was only for a minute or two. The loneliness of the little room struck her: the knick-knacks that brightened it irritated her, and this for the first time. Her head sunk on her hands.

"I have really helped you?"

"Yes, things are much clearer now."

The question, the answer, and the faint smile which had accompanied it were repeating themselves in her mind over and over again.

* * * * *

How long she had been there she did not know, for she was thinking of him, sitting at his writing-table upstairs, putting it all on paper as he had said he would do. What was his room like, she wondered, for she had never seen it. Of a sudden —a step—his step—coming down the stairs. In-

stinctively she felt that he was coming back to her; so she rose and opened the door. Without a word he walked in, she following him. So continuously had she been thinking of him that the strangeness of his proceeding never struck her: it seemed quite natural that he should return.

"Well?" she said inquiringly, as he did not speak.

"I've done it, it's all come splendidly. Thank you, thank you."

A pause.

"But I came down again because I want to ask you something, Miss Moore." He spoke with the slight stammer that she had noticed once already, and he called her by her name, which sounded strange, as if he had never done so before.

"Well? what is it?"

"Would you care to be my wife?" He said it quite easily.

"Yes," she answered, quite easily also, not realising the situation, but knowing by instinct that there was no other answer possible.

"I haven't much, only a few hundreds a year,

about four or five I think. I don't suppose I spend half of it myself. There will be enough for both of us."

At the sound of this bald statement of the practical side of the matter, she winced; but almost immediately, with a woman's quick intuition, she saw that the words had not come naturally, that he had only said them in a blundering endeavour to rise to the situation.

"I don't see many people," he went on in the same, clumsy way, "but I think it would help me having you—with the work, I mean. Would you really care to live with me?"

"Yes." The word came back through her set teeth with a little hissing sound. Her joy struggled with the disappointment she could not help feeling at the way he had said it, and the struggle hurt her considerably.

He crossed the room and stood quite close to her.

"May I kiss you?"

In answer she held up her face; the light of the lamp fell on it, and there was no colour in it. As

he bent down, with a sudden movement she clasped both arms round his neck and dragging his face down to hers, said :

" You will love me, won't you? "

" Yes, of course."

There was a silence painful to each of them. At last with an evident effort he broke it.

" Good night once more."

But she had caught his hand and was holding it tightly, looking anxiously into his face.

" Please," she whispered.

" I—I don't understand."

The blood rushed to her face.

" Please," she repeated under her breath.

He understood ; and when he had kissed her, he went slowly out. On the landing he stumbled heavily over the mat, for the gas on the stairs had been turned off.

V

Mechanically, in a state of unnatural passivity, drifting on as if impelled by some invisible outside force, she lived through the next few days.

Some great thing was about to happen to her, but somehow she shrank from questioning herself concerning it. Outwardly there was little change in her daily life. She went down to the office as usual, for to throw up her situation at a moment's notice was impossible; besides, she clung to the old life instinctively; partly because at the thought that soon it would all be gone, a feeling of dismay, almost of terror, would creep over her; partly because its daily routine enabled her to ignore her own suppressed excitement.

She saw him a good deal oftener now, for every evening he would come down and sit with her. He no longer talked to her about his work since that strange night, now far receded into the past, when he had asked her to marry him; all his fever for it seemed to have passed away. And so, for the first time, their conversation drifted to other things, to the insignificant incidents of their daily existence. Then came the first half-realisation of her ignorance of him, which bewildered her.

For he was quite different now—so different that at times on looking back over the old days she

could scarcely believe that he was the same man. The abrupt self-absorption had given way to a simple kindliness, with a trustful look in his eyes, which sent all her love for him leaping up within her. He had no variation of mood, his easy familiarity, at once gentle and respectful, was always the same.

And, as for Letty, her feeling for him, sprung at first out of her own overwrought sentimental imagination, soon began to grow each day in strength and richness. Into this newborn love for him her whole being fused itself in impetuous rebellion again the life of solitude which had cramped it for so long. With a rapidity, that at first sight seemed startling, she absorbed every detail concerning him, till the whole perspective of her life veered round, everything being subordinated to its relation to him. And all these new things accumulated themselves within her, till their accumulation was painful to endure. For through his easy kindliness of manner she soon divined his supreme unconsciousness of all that the marriage meant to her, and thus her yearning to bring herself at once

quite close to him became anguish; looming in front of her, as it were, she began to dimly perceive the barrier of his own personality, a barrier which was the outcome of years of accumulated habit, and which had grown so natural to him that he ignored its very existence. Yet, following a common paradox of human nature, the further she felt herself from him, the more she loved him.

As the days went by her listlessness concerning practical details became almost wilful, so that he was driven to making most of the arrangements for the marriage, foreign though it all was to his nature. Of course there was to be no ceremony; everything was to be as simple as possible. One morning they were to walk together to the Registrar's office in the King's Road—that was all; and there was no need to hunt for fresh lodgings, for Oswald's flat contained two empty rooms. When he suggested this as he sat with her one evening, she assented without a word of comment. Next, the matter of the moving up of her furniture arose.

"I should think it could all be done in a day,' he murmured, looking vaguely round the room.

"Yes, while we're away."

He looked up, puzzled.

"Away?" he repeated after her.

"Yes, we're going away, aren't we—for—for—the honeymoon," and her voice quavered a little.

"Of course—of course," he answered hurriedly, "but where?" There was a despairing accent in his voice, so dismayed was he at this new, unforeseen difficulty.

The comic side to it never struck her, only she continued, staring vacantly before her:

"I should like to go where we could walk together under tall pine trees, where the bracken grows high and thick, where there are mossy banks to rest oneself upon, and a little inn by the roadside with a gabled roof."

"But I don't know where it is," he said blankly.

"Nor do I," she answered. "I must have read about it in some book."

So they never left London; but on the marriage day, he took her down to Greenwich by steamer instead. And to her that was all the honeymoon.

VI

The crowd, black and restless, swarmed aimlessly round the flaring kiosque, from whence rose and fell the sensuous cadence of a Strauss waltz; behind, amid the tress, winked yellow and sea-green lights, lending an air at once weird and fascinating; while beyond, the buildings of the Exhibition lifted their fire-rimmed roofs.

Oswald and Letty were sitting a little apart from the rest. Since they had come there, the band had played, and ceased, and played and ceased again several times; but, as yet, neither of them had spoken. At last, however, Letty began, realising as she spoke, the length of their silence.

"Look at the people. How silent and sad, all of them! Why is it? Why is every one so sad to-night?"

But not a muscle of his face stirred; he had not heard her.

"Tell me, why is it? Why is every one so sad to-night?" she continued, a shrill note of exasperation in her voice.

Still his lips did not move, and she began moodily to dig up the gravel with the point of her umbrella.

After a pause, with perverse determination to make him speak, she broke out again :

"I wonder if any of them are as unhappy as I am."

This time at her words he started ; he did not know to what she was referring, but the tone of her voice made the anger rise within him. He resented this unhappiness of hers which he saw she was trying to force under his notice. And now he remembered how soon after their marriage it had begun—reproachful generalities, fits of inexplicable irritability, of exacting affection, or of studied coldness. They had been married several weeks ; how many he scarcely knew, only the old life seemed to have receded far, far into the past.

Since the night when he had asked her to marry him he had done no work. There was nothing strange in this, for in between the outbreaks of work-fever, he had always been accustomed to spend weeks without once putting pen to paper—

unbroken weeks of eventless peace, as it seemed to him to-night. But now she was always there, with her air of suppressed discontent, from which he shrank, never meeting it openly, pretending to ignore it. To arrive at an explanation of it he never attempted. The necessary effort, and a vague dread of consequences were more than sufficient to deter him.

It had been a strange thing this marriage of his—a thing so sudden, so impulsive, that, as he thought, he marvelled at it. This woman by his side, her full-lipped mouth quivering with an expression that he disliked—all at once, she seemed no longer near him ; but, from a distance, as it were, he was looking at her as one looks upon a stranger—a stranger who had come into his life and who was changing it all for him.

Back his thoughts drifted to his unfinished book, and the craving for work returned, coming as a great relief. To-morrow morning he would start again. There were passages, especially in the last chapter, that sadly needed revision. Yes, to-night he would begin. And, all at once, a whole multi-

tude of ideas, leaping up, chased one another across his brain. Expressionless his eyes stared out across the crowd, while a wonderful intuition seemed for a moment to lay bare the whole secret of his life. But it was for a moment only, gloriously it all flitted past and was gone.

He rose.

"Shall we go home?" Letty asked. There was a note of penitent tenderness in her voice.

"Yes, I want to look over a manuscript. I'm going to begin work again to-morrow morning. Come, this is the shortest way. We can get a cab at the entrance."

"Oh! my Oswald," she exclaimed, "I *am* glad. You will talk it all over with me, just as you used to do before, in the old days, won't you? That will be splendid. And I will help you—ever so much. Listen, I've thought of something. Do you remember how once you said to me that ideas came to you in talking, but that when you tried to write them down, they all slipped away? Well, you shall talk to me, I will write it all down. I can write quite quickly enough, I'm sure. I used to

take down articles like that years ago at the office, when they were in a hurry. That will help you, won't it?"

They had left the gardens and were walking rapidly down the main hall, she, her face lit up to excited radiancy, he, preoccupied, frowning a little.

VII

The next morning, when she awoke, he was already dressed and gone. Should she slip on a dressing-gown and go to him? Not just yet—presently; for she shrank from the reality that awaited her. So she lay on in bed, and closing her eyes, half asleep and half awake, dreamed that they were together on a desert island and that he was loving her in a new, wonderful way. After awhile she awoke more completely, and she grew restlessly curious to find out what he was doing.

Breakfast was ready in the little dining-room, but only a single place was laid.

"Mr. Nowell's writing in his room, ma'am, and

he said he shouldn't want no breakfast, and that he mustn't be disturbed," explained the servant.

She sat down ; but beyond a cup of tea and half a slice of dry toast, she could eat nothing.

A mental pain, dull at first, growing in intensity as she brooded over it, was settling down upon her. This was the first time that she had breakfasted alone since their marriage : so he did not want her —yet last night, when she had proposed that she should help him— no, it struck her now that he had made no movement of assent. And she had somehow taken for granted that he would like it. How happy the thought of it had made her. For a long while as he slept heavily by her side, she had lain awake thinking of it in a state of excited happiness. "He mustn't be disturbed"—that was his message. All at once, tumultuously, her wounded pride rose within her. He did not want her—she, who had loved him—ah ! how she had loved him. There was nothing she would not have done for him ; and he scorned it all—who was he to treat her in this way ? She had thrown herself away on him—he did not care for her, not a bit ; a dozen

small signs of his indifference occurred to her. Why had he married her, then? Oh! why had he made her love him, since he did not care for her? And in bitter, reckless desire for self-inflicted pain, she strove to conjure up all the silly day-dreams she had had about him.

Then, of a sudden, her mood changed. Her love for him, pent up and unsatisfied, cried out in anguish, "Oswald, Oswald," and big teardrops rolled down her cheeks. "Come to me, my Oswald, you are the whole world to me." Yes, she would go to him and tell him all; she would break down this barrier that lay between them. But not now. He was at work. She must not disturb him. He would not like it. Perhaps he would answer her crossly. And, with a rush, her pride broke forth again, fiercer this time. Thus, while the hands of the clock slipped round, they wrangled together, her wounded pride and her wounded love.

* * * * *

"Mr. Nowell says you needn't wait lunch for him, ma'am; I've just taken him some coffee and

bread-and-butter, and he says he won't want anything more till tea-time.'

* * * * *

Tea-time—so he meant to stop work at tea-time—nearly four hours to wait. A quarter of an hour of it she killed, trying to eat some luncheon. After this she fetched her bonnet and went out, wandering disconsolately down the Embankment. Unconsciously she took the way along which she had walked so often with him. And her thoughts were very bitter.

* * * * *

With Oswald hour after hour was slipping by—only the scratching of the pen, and the tick-tick of the clock. How good he felt, as two or three times he leant back, stretching his arms, back to the regular grind after the nerve-exasperating idleness of the past weeks! Then he would turn to again.

As for Letty, her image never once crossed his mind. Outside the work in which, with the exhilaration of new-found freedom, he was revelling, he had forgotten everything; all things were alike.

When he had finished, he strolled downstairs and out into the street, never looking to see what she was doing. The summer evening was clear and cool, the roadway glowed like a track of beaten gold, and his brain, lazily drinking it all in, sank into a delicious torpor.

* * * * *

About five o'clock he came in. Letty was already drinking her tea; she had not waited for him. She gave him no word of greeting; only a look expressive, as a woman alone can give.

But he noticed nothing; he did not even remember that he had not spoken to her before that day.

"It's been splendid," he broke out. "Splendid. I feel a different man."

"Your tea is getting cold," she answered in icy exasperation.

"I've written that last chapter from beginning to end, and nearly finished another one," he went on, taking up the cup, "there's a real rhythm about the last three pages."

"The muffin is down by the fire."

"Look here," putting down his tea untasted, "I'll just fetch them and read them."

In a minute he was back again, the manuscript in his hand.

He walked up and down, trying the sound of the sentences sometimes over and over again before passing on to the next, or appealing to her as to the justness of a word or continuing without waiting for her verdict.

The scene in her own old little room underneath, the evening that he had asked her to marry him, came back to Letty. She felt that she could bear it no longer, but, with a last effort, clenching her teeth, she restrained herself.

When he had finished he turned to her:

"Well?"

But there was no answer from the white, set face.

"Come, say something," he went on almost roughly.

Slowly her head began to droop, the lips pressed tighter and tighter together, till they were quite bloodless. Suddenly, burying her face in her

hands, she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" he exclaimed, making no attempt to conceal his annoyance.

"Can't you see?" she burst out. "Are you as heartless as that?"

"Heartless! What do you mean? Whatever do you want?"

"Oh! nothing," she answered in a hard voice, and there the c nversation ended; a few minutes afterwards he went back to his study.

VIII

After this, in grim serenity, a whole month passed, while the breach between them steadily widened. On Letty's part all signs of the smouldering fire within her disappeared beneath a permanent attitude of chilly apathy. By a mutual, tacit understanding neither spoke to the other, beyond attempting now and then some forced commonplace remark, when the tension of silence

became especially intolerable. But even this pretence of intercourse was rare, for, except during the evening meal, they were never together. And, as often as not, Letty would sit with an open book before her plate, taking refuge in the old habit of reading, which she had dropped since her marriage.

All this while, the fever of creation was consuming Oswald more rapidly than it had ever done before. In a sort of blind recklessness, fostered, at first, to a considerable extent by an instinctive striving to forget the strain of the daily life with Letty, he would shut himself up in his study every morning, and struggle on till evening, with scarcely any food, till his eyes throbbed and it seemed that endless regiments of heavy soldiers were tramping across his brain. When he had done, he would lie in his armchair, a helpless prey to fits of depression, inexplicable as it seemed to him, but which were in reality the reaction that inevitably followed the long hours of cerebral excitement. The effort required to seat himself each morning at his writing-table grew greater and greater, and the progress

achieved was each day less and less. His brain under the continual, accumulated strain, became impotent with exhaustion, and he would sit for hours, feebly grappling with a single sentence.

Letty never appeared to observe that anything was the matter with him ; she made no comment when his appetite grew smaller and smaller. Only once, as he furtively glanced across the table at her, he perceived that she was scrutinising him with a strange, searching look that he did not understand.

And, with the acute sensitiveness of an over-strained nervous system, he grew to hate this half-hour face to face with her over the evening meal; in her presence he felt painfully uneasy, as if there were hanging over his head a storm, which, at any moment, might break and overwhelm him. So that every time she began to speak to him, he was conscious of a spasm of alarm ; and all through the day, the dread of meeting her was present in his mind.

One evening—he had been working later than usual—when the servant came in to tell him that

dinner was ready, and that Letty had already begun, he felt that he could bear it no longer. He waited till the girl was gone back to the kitchen; then crept stealthily along the passage, took down his hat from the peg behind the door, and hurried out down the stairs, into the street.

From the river came a fresh breeze. Before he had walked a dozen yards, his brain began to reel, and a black mist floated before his eyes. He clutched at a railing to steady himself, and crawled on to an eating-house round the corner.

The place was sordid-looking and far from cleanly, and a hot smell of cooking pervaded it. Oswald found his way to one of the narrow tables covered with greasy and yellow oilcloth and sat down. Presently a young man, in his shirt-sleeves, fetched him from the counter at the far end a steaming plateful of hot food. Oswald began to eat feebly, glancing up at the door between each mouthful, Letty! if she should come and find him out here; and he fancied she was standing before him, beckoning to him to follow her. His fork slipped from his hand. He was asleep over his food.

He awoke with a start; some one was shaking him roughly by the shoulders. It was the young man in his shirt-sleeves who had waited upon him. The room was empty, and all the lights but one had been extinguished. With a shiver, Oswald rose and went home, slinking up the stairs of the flats. All was dark; Letty had gone to bed. For the first time since their marriage, he unlocked the door of the room where he had always slept in the old days. And, fetching some blankets from a cupboard, he arranged them, as best he could, on the narrow bedstead.

So that now they were separated day and night,

The next day Letty expressed no surprise at his behaviour, and that evening and each following evening, he went out to the eating-house round the corner, sitting there stupidly over his food, till the young man in his shirt-sleeves turned out the lights.

And as time went on the thought of death began to haunt him till it became a constant obsession. in the daytime, fascinated by it, he would lay down his pen and sit brooding on it; at night, he would

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lie tossing feverishly from side to side, with the blackness that was awaiting ever before him. And with the sickly light of the early morning, there met him the early relief of having dragged on one day nearer the end.

IX

"Don't go out this evening. I ask you to stay in to dinner. I have a particular reason."

She was standing in the doorway of his study, on her face a look of infinite pleading, strangely out of harmony with the stiffness of her phrases.

All day he had been writing, squandering in a sort of fierce delight the last desperate rally of his brain, and now that he felt his strength to be running low, goading himself on with pitiless obstinacy.

After she had spoken, there was silence, for he could not immediately transfer his thoughts to what she had said. When at last he did so, it was in savage irritation that he answered:

"I can't—I don't know—I'm busy"

* * * * *

An hour and a half later the servant came in to tell him that his wife was waiting dinner for him. The phase of irritability was gone. With weary docility he collected the scattered sheets of paper and followed her into the dining-room, the manuscript in his hand.

He was unaware whether the expression with which she greeted him was angry or pained, for he never looked at her. Without a word he walked straight to his place and sat down. Putting the manuscript on his plate, he began mechanically to turn over the pages. In a few minutes he ceased, and leant back wearily in his chair.

* * * * *

A long while, a short while, he knew not which, and consciousness began to return. A white table before him—a half finished pudding. He was alone ; she had gone. The manuscript !—surely he had had it in front of him. Where is it ?—gone ! He looked up, and the first thing that met his glance was Letty, her face half turned away from him, evidently unaware that he was awake, on her lap the manuscript. Presently the crackling sound

of crumbling paper, next, the harsh noise of tearing; she was tearing it, slowly, deliberately. Then, again and again; it was with a sort of frenzied fierceness that she was tearing now, and the fragments were fluttering on to the floor. She stood upright, and quickly, without heeding him, went past.

It was dead; she had killed it—this was the end. He picked up some of the fragments, handling them gently, tenderly almost. A wild look came into his face: he followed her out of the room.

* * * * *

Softly he pushed the door open, and stood, in hesitation, on the threshold. From below, through the open window, came the rattle of wheels and an instant after the distant wail of a steam-tug. The room was almost dark, only the dim night-light from outside. Yet he was quite familiar with its arrangement, and this somehow astonished him a little. Almost simultaneously two thoughts occurred to him. That it was a long time since he had been inside the room, and that he had slept there with her many nights. Where was she? Suddenly,

quite close to him, so close that he shuddered, the sound of heavy breathing. It was she. He could see her huddled form, shapeless in the dark, crouching by the bedside. The rumble of wheels died away, the noise of her breathing grew in intensity till it filled the whole room.

Holding his breath in dread lest she should discover him, he peered through the obscurity at her. By degrees he perceived that she was kneeling with her head buried between her two arms, which were stretched out straight on the bed in front of her. Then, a queer muffled sound, breaking in upon the stillness—she was speaking, and his fingers closed on the door handle.

"Oh God! Merciful God! Listen to me; hear me. Almighty God! They say that Thou helpest people who are in trouble. Surely it cannot be much to Thee just to help me. Dear God! (here she began to sob) I cannot bear it any longer, indeed I cannot. Bring him back to me, God, just for a moment. I wanted him. Oh, how I wanted him! And I will give up my whole life to Thee. I swear it, my whole life shall

be Thine. I have been wicked, very wicked in the past. Give me this one thing, and I will do whatever Thou wishest. Almighty, merciful God, say that Thou wilt help me!"

For a while her sobs choked her utterance. Oswald's fingers pressed tighter and tighter on the door-handle. She broke out again:

"Oswald, my Oswald, come back to me. Oswald, Oswald, my husband, speak to me—oh! speak to me, just one little word. What have I done that you will not speak to me? What is it that has taken you from me? Oh! I want you, I want your love. Oswald, my Oswald, I cannot live without it. Come back to me, come back to me. I cannot bear it any longer. It is killing me. Oh! it is killing me. If only it could be."

X

He stood in the middle of the suspension bridge, peering down through the iron-work at the river.

A long fall through the air—the water black, cold and slimy, the rush down his throat, the fight for breath, to sink down, down at once, and the yearning for the peace of death swept through him.

Could he crawl through the iron-work? No, it was too small. And some one might see him. He must clamber over, quickly. As he looked round him to see if he were observed, his eyes fell on a heap of flints a few yards off, where the road was under repair. He went up to it, and stooping down, began, with the feeble slowness of an old man, to fill his pockets with the stones. Then he went back to the bridge edge, and gripping the stanchions, prepared to swing himself on to the top of them. As he did so, a blackness filled his eyes; a dull thud; his body dropped back on to the roadway—dead.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

IT was a chilly October night in a notorious "den" beyond the water—since closed by the police.

Half a dozen gross gas-jets lit up the long, low room, making a procession of queer-shaped shadows dance restlessly about the walls: here and there, dotted about, crudely coloured chromos of the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and one or two half-naked prize-fighters.

It was a Saturday night, so the place was quite full—bargemen with grimy furrows across their bronzed faces; plenty of typical river casuals sucking stumpy clay-pipes; in a corner a group of pasty-faced youths quarrelling over their greasy cards; and scattered about the room some river-side prostitutes, their cheap finery all bedraggled with mud. A veritable Babel rose from these dregs

of a population—hoarse laughter, snatches of songs and oaths.

It was hot, a foul, unhealthy heat; the very walls were sweating, and a bluish haze was filling the room up to the blackened ceiling.

I was vainly looking about me for a seat, when a mason, whose corduroys were still white with lime, pulled my arm and motioned me to a place next him, at the same time lifting the woman who was occupying it on to his knees.

Then he began again to beat the table, with an empty pewter-pot, to the refrain of a popular song. At intervals he would stop, grin across at me, and hug his companion.

She, too, was young: perhaps she had been striking-looking once; at least her eyes were still fine, but the lips were shapeless, the voice was hoarse and overpitched, and the complexion was muddy-coloured. I was watching this typical couple, when suddenly I heard a plaintive voice behind me.

A girl stood there, death-white, with dark rings round her eyes. The corners of her bloodless lips

were quivering, as though she were in great pain.

"Jack,' murmured the plaintive voice, "ain't yer comin' back?"

The mason looked across at her with drunken solemnity, shrugged his shoulders, and put his arms round the woman on his knees.

In one flash the eyes of the two women met; of a sudden the whole expression of the young girl's face changed. Like wild beasts, they glared at each other: the one, with all the exasperated fury of interrupted appetite; the other, with the instinctive desperate hatred of a mother defending her young.

She clutched at a pewter-pot as if to fling it in her rival's face, but the impulse passed away, and letting it fall listlessly, she turned again to the mason and said in the same, plaintive voice:

"Jack, come along, do."

"'Ee knows when 'ee's well off, my dear," said the prostitute, pursing up her heavy lips and offering them to her companion.

"At least give us some money," went on the other,

"the kids ain't touched a bit since morning, and I've nothing."

The mason, by this time exasperated, burst out, bringing his fist down on the table:

"Go to hell!"

"But baby'll die, if she don't get something," persisted the girl.

A hoarse laugh from the prostitute was all the reply.

This little scene was beginning to attract the attention of the occupants of the surrounding tables—the gambling group in the corner threw down their cards at the prospect of a fight; two women opposite began to jeer.

Whiter than ever, the girl stood there, braving them all; then dropping her head, she ran out of the room like a hunted animal. I had already left my seat and was watching the scene from the doorway. When the girl passed out, I followed her, curious to see the end of it.

She hurried along, through the ill-lit streets till she came to the river.

It was a starless night, but the full moon had just risen from behind the thin, headless necks of

a cluster of chimneys which stood out black against the lurid glow reflected by the lights of the city; across the river lay a ragged pathway of quivering, silver light.

There was an uncanny stillness about the spot. The water flowed sluggishly, stealthily by; not a sign of life on board the black hulks moored to the banks, only from the distance came the feverish rumble of the great city.

A cab was crawling up, its yellow lamps gleaming like the round eyes of some great night beetle; nearer, at the street corner, a policeman and a woman stood talking. The girl, crossing the road, made straight for the river; and the policeman turned to follow her. She stopped when she came to the edge, for she saw the policeman was close behind her; leaning against the parapet she stared down at the water, her head between her hands.

I passed close by her. The moonlight made her pinched face seem whiter than ever, the tears were dripping on to the pavement. I sat down on a bench a few yards off and waited.

Presently, the small, black figure of a man came slinking along under the wall. When he saw the girl leaning over the parapet, he stopped and went slowly up to her.

He passed behind her, turned, and passed again. She had not stirred. He was now standing by her side, examining her from head to foot, cynically, as a horse-dealer examines a horse. Presently he put his hand on her arm and spoke to her.

I could not hear what they were saying; but I saw the girl shake her head several times, while the other seemed to be speaking very fast.

After a while, they moved away together, and as they passed in front of the bench were I was sitting, I heard her saying in a broken voice :

"Half a crown then, and I can go home in an hour."

DISSOLVING VIEW

IN a low, roomy armchair, puffing gently at a long-stemmed pipe, Vivian Marston was listening to the wail of the wind as it swept fitfully down the street, complacently pitying the wretches who, cut by its blast, were shivering outside, this bleak November evening. Slowly his eyes travelled round the luxuriously furnished room, every detail of which reminded him of his own cosiness, and he became conscious of a vague glow of internal satisfaction. Resting his feet on the fender-bar, he began to think of himself.

Leisurely he recapitulated all that conduced to his self-satisfaction. His silky hair, which one woman had liked to stroke; his large, grey eyes, "expressive," another had called them; his money it pleased him to remember that he was rich, richer even than most rich people; next, how his

new hunter, thanks to the excellent line he had taken, had shown the whole field the way on Saturday, and how, last week, he had crumpled up pheasant after pheasant in a tearing wind, when the others couldn't touch them; last, of Gwynnie, the biggest triumph of all, Gwynnie, his Gwynnie, whom he was going to marry in the spring. And before him defiled, in a grotesque procession, all the men who wanted to marry her; each one, as he passed, looking up in jealous admiration.

From Gwynnie, his thoughts wandered to the others to whom he had made love before her. And a gentle, sentimental melancholy, which was delicious, stole over him. The images of most of them were blurred, half-effaced by time; one alone remained clear-cut. Many weeks it was since he had thought of her, for there was nothing in his life now to remind him of her. She was only a little chorus-girl, yellow-eyed and freckled, with a cracked voice that grated on the ear. He wondered, looking back over it all, what had been the link between them. Perhaps her splendid masses of hair, dark chestnut shot with gold; perhaps her

quaint, clinging winsomeness. Towards the end she had grown capricious and fretful, and he had tired considerably of her; but that he did not remember. Only he heard once again the small imperfect voice raised in anger, as they stood together the last evening in the narrow, theatre corridor, with the single gas jet flaring behind. The next day she was gone, with a Frenchman who played third fiddle in the orchestra, so they said. And Vivian, the first moment of pique over, forgot her. With curious ease she dropped out of his life. At the end of a week the gap she had left was scarce perceptible. All that happened ten months ago.

He unlocked a drawer in the writing-table, and took from it a packet of letters—ten or perhaps a dozen in all, and three of them much longer than the rest. These last she had written in the autumn when he was away in the Mediterranean yachting. One after the other he read them, and, as he did so, a curious uncomfortable feeling crept over him. The vision of the thick, rich hair, encircling the yellow eyes, and little freckled face, seemed to

change, charged with new meaning. Between the lines he began to read all that the mis-spelt scrawlings on these cheap, shiny half-sheets of note-paper had meant for her. He remembered how their illegibility had used to amuse him, and he was puzzled that he had not understood them then as he did now. There was one, worse written than the others, full of reproaches, that she had not seen him for three days. After that he read no more, but impatiently threw the packet into the blazing grate.

He lit another pipe, and for some little time more sat on exasperated, trying to force his thoughts into another channel.

* * * * *

96 PAXTON STREET, W.C.
Sunday.

"DEAR VIV,

"i am very ill the Dr says i shall get better but it is not true. i have got a little boy he was born last tusday you are his farther so you will see to him when i am ded will you not dear Viv. Louis is gone to Parris he was mad because

of the child. Viv dear for the sake of old times com and see me gest once it is not a grand place were i am but I do long to see your dear face again. Plese Viv forgiv me for going of with Louis but i thought you did not care for me anny more and it made me mad i am sending this to the old adress i hope you will get it alright.

"Your loving

"KIT."

Motionless, he was staring at the sheet of paper in his hand. He could not think; stunned, his brain refused to function. Thus a whole minute passed. At last, mechanically, he picked up the envelope which was lying on the breakfast-table. He turned it over, absently at first, but, with returning consciousness, he noticed that there were two addresses on it; it must have been forwarded from his old lodgings, and, looking closer, he saw that one of the postmarks was nearly a month old. Once more he read the letter through, then again, and then a third time. Gradually a dizzy faintness and a sickening feeling in his stomach came over

him. The air seemed close and stifling, but he had not the strength to cross the room to open the window. He sat down feebly by the fire, and, as he did so, he became aware that his hands were clammy with perspiration.

A moment or two and it passed. His thoughts were liberated ; he was able to think again.

Kit was dying ; by this time perhaps dead. Kit dead—stiff and cold between white sheets, lying flat all but her feet, which, upright, projected at the foot of the bed, her face expressionless, the freckles yellower than ever against the death-pale skin. And the child? He felt a thrill of exasperation against the useless, unwanted child. But it was his child—then it was he who——

Suddenly the door opened. He started, every nerve in his body tingling. It was the servant bringing in his breakfast. The man set down the shining covers and steaming coffee-urn, while Vivian, half-dazed, watched him curiously, for there seemed something strangely unreal about his unconcernedness.

At last he moved towards the door.

"Get me a cab," said Vivian, huskily. Then perceiving the astonished look on the man's face, he added hurriedly:

"I have to go out—at once—important business."

* * * * *

As the hansom rolled along, Vivian's thoughts rushed back over the past. Incident after incident crowded up in his memory, and this hideous sequel to his love for Kit gave to each a new, ugly significance. It was the culmination towards which all the rest pointed. The cab shot past an omnibus lumbering city-ward, and he found himself marvelling at the difference between the people seated inside it and him. Surely they had never had things like this in their lives. And his thoughts writhed under the increasing pain—then, a quick twinge of hunger, reminding him that he had had no breakfast. Back came the object of his journey. He was going to see Kit. It was as if he and she had never had anything in common, as if he only knew of her by hearsay—but somehow, she and her child had spoilt everything for him. And he understood how he hated going, how he shrunk from bringing her

back into his life. But for the irresistible force inside him, urging him forward, he would have turned homeward again. Gwynnie, how could he marry her after this? Strange that he felt no anger against Kit, for having come between them, only he wondered vaguely if it would be easy to get rid of her. But perhaps she was dead—oh! to know for certain that it was so; and the sense of relief, which he knew to be a delusion, was so keen that it hurt him. But the child?—the child—that would live on. They always did. Gloomily, incoherently, he brooded over what was to be done with it.

The cab turned into a side street, scattering some squalid children from off the narrow, asphalted road. There was an untidiness about the neighbourhood, an untidiness that was almost indecent, the untidiness of a bed that has been slept in. Here and there, in the doorways, lounged slatternly women in dirty, colourless petticoats. As the cab passed they looked up, and under their gaze, Vivian winced. All the repulsive features of the neighbourhood stared him brutally in the face. Surely

it must be close now? Here? The hansom pulled up before a dingy Italian restaurant: the driver was asking the way of some men smoking cigarettes before the door. They were foreigners, and answered him, all speaking at once, with gestures. A spasm of impotent rage passed over Vivian: he could almost have struck them. The cab moved slowly along: then stopped again at the end of the street. Vivian got out.

He knocked, and, before the narrow seedy-looking door, stood waiting. His excitement made his teeth chatter as with cold. This annoyed him, and, in the struggle to divert his thoughts, he forced himself to take stock of the house. There was nothing peculiar about it; its sordidness was neither greater nor less than that of those next to it or opposite to it. Only across the ground-floor window there stretched a card bearing the words "Apartments."

Kit was inside this house: perhaps in the very room into which he could almost see from the door-step. He imagined himself arguing with her, persuading her, reminding her of the old days, giving

her money—a large sum of money, the loss of which he would not feel—enough to make her and the child comfortable for life—doing anything and everything to get her to go away at once, to some spot where he would never even hear of her again. Surely she would agree to that. It would be for her own benefit, quite as much as for his. Yes, after all, he would be doing the handsome thing by her, and for an instant, he deluded himself into a glimmer of self-satisfaction.

The sound of a voice, breaking the train of his thoughts—in the area below a grimy woman, her sleeves rolled back over her red arms.

"Well, what d'yer want?" she asked, defiantly.

"I want to see Miss Gilston."

"Thur ain't no Miss Gilston livin' 'ere," she called back fiercely, evidently angry at having been disturbed for nothing. She prepared to re-enter the house.

"But," Vivian went on, "didn't she—about a month ago."

"No, I tell yer, I ain't 'ad no Miss Gilston 'ere. Thur was a Mrs. Marston"—at the sound of his

own name shouted up through the area railings, Vivian's hands clenched and instinctively he glanced up the street to see if any one was within ear-shot—"a few weeks back, but she was took ill with a baby, and she died, poor soul."

Mrs. Marston—his name—she had taken it then, —and his head began to swim a little—but she was dead—dead—gone—dead!

"What's become of the child?" he heard himself asking. The sound of his own voice startled him, for he did not recognise it.

"The baby died along with 'er," shouted the woman. "She didn't leave a blessed sixpence behind 'er. Two week and a arf rent she owed me, besides 'er food, all sorts of delictasses I used to git for 'er." Then with a change of tone, perhaps desirous of a gossip, perhaps struck by Vivian's prosperous appearance, "Jest wait a minute. I'll come up and tell yer all about it."

He was leaning against the area railings, scarcely hearing what she was saying, conscious only of the immense relief that was creeping over him. The child dead too. Both of them gone for ever. He

became aware that the high-pitched voice had ceased; the woman had left the area. And he looked feebly around for her, the monotonous squalor of the close-packed, brown-brick houses hurt him more than before—oh! to get out of it, away from it, quickly, at once. Kit—it was as if she had never existed. It was like an episode in another man's life.

With a sudden, imperious impulse, he left the doorstep and walked rapidly away down the street.

Twenty minutes later he was seated before his breakfast-table, eating voraciously; for the morning excursion had given him a splendid appetite.

* * * * *

A month afterwards, Gwynnie and he were married. It was a smart wedding. There was a fashionable crowd, and the couple started to spend their honeymoon in Italy.

A DEAD WOMAN

I

"MARY, two bitters and a small Scotch to the Commercial Room, and a large Irish for Mr. Hays here."

"Yes, Mr. Rushout," answered the girl, measuring out the spirit and swinging down the silver-knobbed handles.

Then she whisked herself out of the room, and the two men were alone. Neither spoke, but their silence evidently resulted from no constraint; it was quite natural that each should be all content with his own thoughts.

There was no mistaking the dejection of Rushout, the landlord. His corpulent and unwieldy frame lay inert; the features of his smooth, congested face hung limp in gloomy abstraction.

Opposite him, stiffly upright on the edge of his chair, sat Jonathan Hays, bony and gaunt in his

rough frieze coat, corduroy leggings and iron-bound boots, while his bushy, red hair and untrimmed beard added not a little to the uncouthness of his appearance.

One end of the room gave on to the entrance of the inn, through a window, across which stretched the broad, brown shelf that did duty for the bar. On either side of this opening were ranged row upon row of glasses, of all shapes and sizes, and all along the edges of the shelves were suspended glistening pewter mugs. Sporting prints, a rack-full of walkingsticks and hunting crops, a large coloured almanack, some pictures of fattened sheep and cattle, illustrating the results of using certain artificial foods, adorned the rest of the room. In the grate glowed a lavish fire, before which a cat lay curled.

"Are ye takin' nothin' yeself?" asked Jonathan, as he filled up his glass from the water-bottle. "Have a drop o' port: it'll cheer ye, maybe."

Rushout made a faint sign of dissent.

"Ye're for a smoke then," persisted the other, producing a battered tin box, half full of tobacco.

"Nay, I've lost all inclination for't."

The farmer pulled out a blackened pipe and filled it with slow precision. He had all but finished when there burst down the passage a strident guffaw of laughter.

"That'll be Mike, I'll swear."

"Ay," Rushout replied listlessly.

"How's t' house doing, Richard?" asked Jonathan.

"Middlin'."

The other drank and sucked his moustache appreciatively.

"Jonathan," Rushout began.

"Well?"

"It'll be a twelvemonth to-day."

"Ay, sure, that it be," and he started all at once to puff vigorously at his pipe. "Ay, jest a twelvemonth. Lord, how time flies! It don't seem as it was last back end, do it? Ye'll best be soon looking about ye, Richard. T' house can never prosper while there be no missus, and jest look at that broomstick woman ye've got now is sufficient to drive even Mike over the way. I tell ye man, ye'll

have to bestir yeself," he continued, raising his voice as he saw that his words had produced no effect on the other's apathy, "the custom 'll go to pieces, right off, mark my words."

And, with an air of profound conviction, he repeated, "Mark my words, Richard."

"Jonathan," said Rushout presently, "I'm partin' with the white mare."

"What?—not——"

"Ay, *her* mare. She be jest spoilin' herself in stable and I can't abide drivin' her myself."

"Who's for buyin' her?"

"Dr. Wilkinson. He was in this mornin' about her."

"What're ye askin'?"

"Forty-five."

Once more they both relapsed into silence. It was again Rushout who spoke first.

"Jonathan, it's a twelvemonth to-day. I'm goin' to drink to her soul." He drained the wineglass to the dregs and set it down again with almost reverent precaution. The other stared at him in stolid astonishment; then mutely raised his glass to his

lips and did likewise. The glances of the two men met, and parted again hastily. It was as if the one had detected the other in some secret deed. The publican obstinately examined the fire; the farmer toyed with his glass, rinsing the spirit round and round.

"Did ye part with them ewes?" asked Rushout. He was obviously struggling to appear unconcerned; but the huskiness of his utterances belied the effort.

"Every one of them. 'Twas a good job too; they were always a troublesome lot."

"Jonathan, do ye believe in ghosts?" A shout of laughter from down the passage followed immediately on the question which was delivered in impressive solemnity.

The farmer took time before answering: the matter was too serious to be settled off-hand.

"I don't know but what I should, if I se'ed one," he said at last.

"It'll be near eleven likely?"

"It wants half an hour."

"I believe she'll come to-night."

Jonathan started violently; his clay pipe fell to the floor, smashing into a dozen pieces.

"Ye're a fool, Richard," he exclaimed, stooping forward and ruefully picking up the fragments.

"Ye never knew her when that likeness was taken," Rushout continued, pointing to a photograph surrounded by a deep black border, which hung on the wall. "I had it done jest after we were married. It's simply magnificent. That was when we kept the 'King's Head' at Dewston. She *was* a beauty in them days. Why the whole place was jest wild about her. And we'd ha' been married thirteen years come Martinmas. God! it do take the life out of a man!" he concluded. His speech had grown thick, and the gurgle of a stifled sob sounded through the room.

Jonathan was engaged in fitting together the fragments of his broken pipe. Gradually his fingers stiffened, his eyebrows contracted, a sullen look swept over his face. He never raised his eyes but kept them fixed on his fingers. Next he blurted out, pushing back his chair roughly:

"I'll ha' to be gettin' home."

"Good night, old man," answered the other feebly, without moving.

Jonathan went out. In the passage he stumbled over his dog who lay across the doorway; with a vicious kick he sent him yelping into the street The night was clear and frosty, and his footfall over the cobbles, as he strode away, broke with strange brutality the silence of the sleeping village.

II

The village shops were drowsily divesting themselves of their shutters, and the two or three loafers hanging about the parapet of the bridge over the river, their hands thrust deep in their trouser pockets, were stolidly watching the rickety one-horsed omnibus as it rattled past on its way to meet the early train, when Jonathan, his collie at his heels, swung round the corner.

One of the men on the bridge jerked a "marnin'" at him as he strode by; then he had passed, and through the swing door of the "Bear," disappeared.

Inside the discordant note of a woman's angry

voice met his ear. "It was that 'broomstick woman' giving it to the girl," he guessed. And so it was.

The flow of her wrath ceased when she caught sight of him; screwing up her ill-conditioned countenance into a caricature of a smile:

"Good morning, Mr. Hays; grand mornin' this," and turning to the girl cried: "Now what're ye standin' gapin' there for? Get along and see after that breakfast for the coffee-room."

"Ye do let her have it," remarked Jonathan dryly.

"Let her have it," she retorted, "let her have it. I should like to know who wouldn't let her have it, lazy, good-for-nothin' hussy. Her goin's on 'ud try the patience of a saint, and as for her impudence, why——"

"Is t' master in?" interrupted Jonathan.

"In! In! Gracious! In! where d'ye think he'd be? In, indeed! Why it 'ud be a wonder if he's out o' bed yet. And for all the trouble he gives himself he might jest as well stay there. Jest settin' and mopin', the whole blessed day. Senseless,

downright senseless, I call it. Ye'd think his wife had been a sort of female paragon, to see the way he behaves himself. *She* wasn't such a lot to mourn over, by all accounts. No better than she should be, and there he sets, moonin' and soakin' like a great baby."

"Stop that jabberin'," shouted Jonathan, banging his stick down flat on the bar. "Ye know nought agin' her."

"Oh! I know nothin', don't I? Oh! very well, I know nothin'. No, of course I don't. How should I? Only let folks as pretends to have nothin' on their conscience and can't keep a civil tongue in their heads—let 'em look out, I say. I'll teach 'em to march in here with their airs and graces."

But of a sudden the rest died away on her lips, and snatching up a tray, she bounced down the passage into the kitchen. Jonathan faced about seeking the reason for her precipitate departure: behind him stood Rushout.

The landlord's vitality had perceptibly bettered since last night, for he sent an angry glance in the direction of the kitchen-door.

"Mornin'. I thought ye were off to the auction mart."

"Nay, I thought better on't. There's scarce bit doin' jest now."

"Ye'll take a drop to warm ye. It's raw."

"Nay. I've come for a bit o' business."

"Ye're welcome, business or no business. Step inside."

He led the way into the room where they had sat the night before.

"Well," said Rushout, when he had settled down in his chair.

"I've come to buy t' mare."

"Not the white one?"

"Ay, that's her."

Rushout reflected: "What, in the name of goodness, d'ye want with her?"

"I want her," answered the farmer doggedly.

"But what for?" testily retorted the other.

"Maybe I've taken a fancy to her."

Rushout's face broadened to a smile.

"Are ye lookin' for a bit of blood to spank ye to church?"

"Never ye mind, Richard. It's none o' your business why I'm wantin' her," replied Jonathan, nettled.

"Well, it don't make much odds, anyway, because ye can't have her."

"She's not gone yet?"

"Nay, she's not gone, but she's promised. I told Dr. Wilkinson he should have her. Ye know that."

"He's givin' ye forty-five?"

Rushout nodded.

"I'll give ye fifty."

"I tell ye man, it's no good. The affair's concluded. Dr. Wilkinson's to have her. Why if I'd advertised her, I'd have got half that price again, and many a time over, easy. She's jest about the bonniest mare, for her size, I ever saw. And I'm determined Dr. Wilkinson shall have her, and cheap too; for (lowering his voice) there's not another doctor in the neighbourhood as would have done what he did for Jane."

"Settle yer own figure then, I'll give it ye. I'll make it a hundred," persisted Jonathan.

"Are ye crazy?"

"I tell ye I want her."

"And I tell ye, ye can't have her."

"When's she goin'?"

"To-morrow mornin'."

"I'll come back this afternoon. Maybe ye'll have changed yer mind."

And, with that, he marched out into the street.

III

But neither that afternoon nor that evening did Jonathan return to the "Bear." For about sundown, while he was re-penning some sheep in a bare field all strewn with half-gnawed turnips, he heard the stride of the white mare pounding down the road towards him. Ay, t'was she: many a time had he waited before, listening for her action along the road. Behind, in his mustard-coloured ulster, sat Dr. Wilkinson. On perceiving Jonathan, he reined up and called out over the hedge:

"How are the sheep doing, Hays?"

But the question fell unheeded on Jonathan's

ears. He was surveying the mare—her legs, straight, slender, sinewy; her lithe and gracefully rounded body; her undersized head erect, neck arched, and ears cocked, while at regular intervals she shot out bars of breath from her quivering nostrils.

"Isn't she a beauty?" said the doctor, following Jonathan's gaze. "By Jove, she does take some driving, too. She hasn't been between the shafts these ten days. By the way she rushes at her work, you'd think she hadn't stretched her legs since poor Jane Rushout's death."

Jonathan did not answer, so the doctor continued:

"Ah! there wasn't a prettier whip this side of the county than poor Jane Rushout. It was a sad thing! And Richard's getting in a very bad way. I wish something could be done for him. He's got no spirit left—just as cut up as if it all happened yesterday. When I sent my man just now to fetch the mare, he was as overcome as if he were parting with an only child. It *was* a pity they never had any children."

The mare, who had been fidgeting with her bit, now began to paw the ground. The doctor, poking the rug under his legs with the whip-stock, lifted the reins preparatory to starting again.

"Hold hard, doctor," broke in Jonathan. He pushed fiercely through the hedge and laid one hand on the mare's neck, pressing his cheek against her nose and speaking softly and soothingly to her. This for a few seconds, till she tossed up her head, and he was forced to let her go.

"Good day, doctor."

"Good day to you, Hays."

Jonathan watched the retreating gig till it was gone round the corner; then, roughly brushing the back of his hand across his eyes, climbed back into the field. The sheep lifted their heads a moment and fell to nibbling the turnips again. Folding his arms across the top of a hurdle, he rested his chin on them, gazing straight out before him. His ruddy beard glowed as the light from the setting sun caught it, and the look of suppressed suffering on his face lent a curious refinement to

its ruggedness. And the fantastic tracery of a couple of gnarled oaks stood out against the glare as of some burning city on the horizon.

IV

After this an obstinate combination of calamities made a busy time for Jonathan—an outbreak of sickness among his sheep, coupled with the unexpected departure of his shepherd, and the destruction of fence after fence by a sudden rising of the river; and as his energy, dogged, desperate almost at times, overcame one difficulty, a fresh one would discover itself.

Two miles away, in the village, the procession of eventless days defiled in sluggish regularity. Rushout rose from his bed in the morning only to lie torpid for hours before the fire in the little room behind the bar, now staring into the glowing coals, now sunk in stupid slumber.

At all hours the shrill voice of the "broomstick woman," as Jonathan had nicknamed her, grated on his ears, till he agreed with himself that she

must go. Yet he took no step, procrastinating, first for one reason, then for another. Every hour saw his indifference to the mechanism of the little world around him take deeper root.

One morning, however, he was conscious that the wrangling voices in the kitchen waxed higher than usual, and presently Mary, the maid stood before him, her cheeks aflame, and her voice tremulous with emotion. "She couldn't stop to be treated like dirt. She desired to give warning—she had put up with it long enough." And when Rushout, remonstrating, endeavoured to soothe her, the girl, bursting into sobs, poured an elaborate, though spasmodic, category of the abuse, tyranny and insults to which she had been subjected. "It 'd never ha' been so if the poor missus were here." And, at these words, Rushout felt all his apathy lift, like a curtain of fog, and the momentary recovery of his old self, stirred him strangely.

"There, there, lass ; ye needna' fash yerself so," he said. "I'll not part with ye. Faith ! I'd sooner give her the sack this forenoon right off, than lose ye."

And at the end of three or four such speeches the girl, pacified, returned to the kitchen.

She had not been gone a moment before the wrangle of voices recommenced, as fierce, nay fiercer, than before. Then the door burst open violently, and the other woman, her soured face, grotesque with passion, stalked into the room.

"I jest want to ask ye, Mr. Rushout, if ye told that girl just now that ye intended me to go sooner than her?"

"Ye're quite correct." He spoke with quiet determination that was not without dignity.

For nearly a minute she was unable to articulate a word.

"Then ye mean to signify that I'm to clear out to suit that chit of a gal."

"If ye can't give over frettin' agin her from mornin' till night," he answered. "She's a downright good girl, that she is; she's been with me these three years and a half, and I've had scarce a fault to find with her, and my wife had never a word agin her."

"Oh! that's it, is it? It's for that that ye're

wanting to turn me off—me that's slaved my soul out to keep the custom in the house, while ye lie soakin' over the fire. Yer wife never had a word to say agin' her—nothin' to say agin' her (mimicking Rushout's intonation). Where's the wonder? I'm not surprised. Of course she hadn't—she was too busy gallivanting about the country."

Rushout struggled to his feet, and advanced threateningly towards her.

"By God! ye dare to say another word agin' her. Ye jade, why ye aren't fit to scrape the dirt off her gig-wheels."

"Ay, ye great, louting coward ye—ye'd be for strikin' me, wouldn't ye? But jest lay so much as yer little finger on me, and I'll have the law agin' ye. Who be ye to call me names? Jade, indeed! D'ye mean to insinuate that I'm not what I should be?"

"Nay, it 'd be powerful curious if ye'd ever had the chance." The adroitness of his retort pleased Rushout, restoring his self-possession.

The woman craned her neck, as if to break into a torrent of abuse; but her impulse changed.

With deliberate and concentrated venom she began:

"Ye poor deluded fool, Richard Rushout! Ye little think how that doll-faced minx hocussed ye the minute yer back was turned. Ye little reckon the proper laughin'-stock she made of ye."

"Shut that sewer of a mouth," thundered Rushout. His wrath had trebled in intensity with its return flow, and the hue of his face darkened to an apoplectic purple.

But the woman was not to be silenced.

"I'll teach ye to throw mud at honest respectable women," she cried back, "a giddy, wanton thing she was, I tell ye. Did ye fancy she'd be satisfied with the boozing good-for-nothing that ye are."

"It's a blasted lie!"

"A lie, is it? Ye can spare me your filthy language, Richard Rushout. Ask Jonathan Hays if it's a lie. Ask Jonathan Hays if he never had his arms round her. Ask Jonathan Hays if he never——"

A spasm of atrocious suffering convulsed Rush

out's face—the poison was doing its work. Snatching at both her wrists, he wrenched her on to her knees.

"Ye'll not stop me—nay, not if ye beat my head in," she hissed. "I'll teach ye to throw mud at me. Ask Jonathan Hays, I tell ye. Ask him where she used to drive that high stepping horse of hers, when ye sat soakin' yeself with a roomful of sots. Ask Jonathan Hays, I——"

"Ye she-devil," shouted Richard, with a guttural cry of anguish, as he flung her into the passage.

Then dizzy and dazed, he dropped into a chair.

V

Rushout never saw the woman again, though her voice resounded outside several times. He sent her out her wages and her railway fare back to Newcastle, from whence she came, by Mary, with a message that the omnibus would call to convey her luggage to the station. After which he ate his lunch, cold beef, beer and cheese, which was all quite tasteless. And early in the afternoon

he heard her depart. The rumble of the omnibus died away in the distance bringing him real relief, for as long as her presence in the house continued to irritate the activity of his rage against her, he felt himself unable to settle down and grapple, face to face, with the new anguish of his doubt. And this he longed to do.

But now that all was still again, he unhooked the photograph from the wall and stood looking into the eyes, long and earnestly. They told him nothing. The guileless candour of their gaze seemed to exhale first tenderness, then mockery. Which was the truth? He set the photograph down on the table, and, going back to his chair, started to ransack the incidents of the past. "Where did she go when she went out driving?" the woman had said. "The white mare." And the first time that they had sat together behind her, the day after he had bought her, came back to him—a crisp, frosty morning, with the sunlight sparkling coldly on the whitened hedges. Next, another time, the week of the Agricultural Show; after lunch they had set off along the North Road to a farm where he had

some business, she holding the reins, he smoking by her side. When they arrived, she had declined to come in, declaring that the mare was too hot to stand, and he, with a glow of pride at her workmanlike solicitude for the animal, why, he himself had asked her to take a message up to Jonathan's about some heifers he was entering for the President's prize. Perhaps—God!—and in his mind's eye he saw the two, locked in each other's arms. He watched the whole scene as it was played before him; she, giving herself with all the gestures and caresses with which he was familiar, till its vividness became almost unbearable. He lifted up the photograph once more. But underneath the faint smile lurked a wealth of smothered corruption; on the half-parted lips he detected the imprint of Jonathan's kisses. Hemmed in, as it were, on every side, he appealed as a last resource to the memories of all their common life; but these, obstinately blurred and confused, came not to the rescue, and his belief in her, losing foothold irrevocably, tumbled headlong into the abyss. Then by sheer intensity his desire to establish the certi-

tude of her faithlessness was fulfilled. Fragments of conversations, chance meetings and exclamations, all were pregnant with damnatory clues. Even meaningless remarks he interpreted as fresh proofs of her guilt.

And if Jonathan, why not with others? With Mike, who was in and out of the house all day—with this and that acquaintance. On, on, the Satanic extravagance of his imagination whirled, till at the zenith of his agony, he was conscious that he loathed her virulently. This discovery made him uneasy, and by some quick, unaccountable process his mind wandered off to the advisability of giving a trial to a new blend of whisky, a prospectus of which had reached him that morning. For the moment, all else, receding into the background, was forgotten; outside this fresh track of thought his mind was a blank. The spirit was cheaper, certainly; but that would be balanced by heavier carriage, unless indeed, he ordered a large quantity. But he was not certain concerning the flavour. As he debated the matter with himself, the idea occurred to consult Jonathan. Immedi-

ately the full strength of his pain was upon him once more. And once more the whole round of self-torturing doubt recommenced, each time with a fresh crop of detail, new pretexts for suffering. That night in his longing for forgetfulness he went to bed drunk. And he had been sober for years.

VI.

He made no effort to acquire fresh proofs. The seed of suspicion sprouted in his mind with the luxuriant growth of a noxious weed; and at the same time his devotion to his dead wife reasserted itself in all the earnestness of its profundity, so that he would turn without transition from the contemplation of her faithlessness to tender recollections of her personality. There was no lifting of the gloom of existence without her; day and night he longed for her; could she have returned he would have shared her with Jonathan willingly. In the sluggish meanderings of his mind he often faced such a contingency, and the consideration of it was in nowise painful. Jonathan—he had never

settled with himself what attitude he should adopt when next they met; indeed, whether he felt any vindictiveness against him or not, he did not know. It was that he simply never considered him in the present, apart from his connection in the past with her who still was everything to him, connection of which now his certitude was quite absolute.

After a while it began to seem many days since he had seen him, and he fell to expecting that he would be in, day after day. That it was because Dr. Wilkinson had got the white mare, he guessed, and he resented no longer the other's anxiety to possess her, though the reason for it was now quite clear. And the thought that the doctor had got her, ceased to give him satisfaction; for he understood how carefully Jonathan would have treated her. He was sorry he had spoken so sharply to him about it.

In the mornings when he woke, then the depression lay heaviest, the fatigue at the joyless prospect of the day in front of him. He cared not a jot that the custom of the house was dwindling daily, that every corner revealed some sign of dirt

and slovenliness. Everything outside his own bodily wants was growing indifferent to him. And the expectation of seeing Jonathan was the solitary daily event that remained.

One Sunday evening, about six o'clock, there began to fall, slowly, silently, big flakes of snow, so that by the time the congregation trooped out of the square-towered church the white carpet lay soft and thick on the ground. Rushout elbowed his way through the group, loitering in the porch, and buttoning up his coat, hurried down the street, as briskly as his ungainly gait permitted. As he pushed through the swing door of the "Bear" the first sound that struck his ear was Jonathan's voice:

"Ye can cart the load Tuesday forenoon," he was saying.

"Right, Mr. Hays, that'll suit," answered another voice.

Rushout walked straight into the commercial room, whence the sound came. As he entered the third man greeted him with the cordiality due to the landlord, but Jonathan remained silent. Rush-

out stood irresolute: the sight of his beard and pale face caused him an unexpected agitation. It brought back the past with, as it were, a change of perspective, that filled him with excitement. He discovered that there was something about Jonathan's physiognomy offensive, violently, imperiously. Yet it was not all at once that he realised this impression, so overwhelming was its unexpectedness.

Presently the third man bid them good-night, and the door banged behind him.

Almost immediately Jonathan, awkward-looking in his ill-fitting Sunday suit and stiff, black hat, prepared to depart also.

"A wintry evening," he mumbled.

"Nay, ye cannot go," said Richard in a voice at once low and full of determination. And he blocked the doorway. "Sit ye down again.'

The farmer obeyed. He turned his hat round and round on his lap: a twinge shot across his face and was gone. It was evident that he had guessed what was coming.

Then he waited, stolidly resigned. Rushout was

still too agitated to determine where to begin. At last, when for a moment his astonishment got the better of his anger, he broke the silence with :

"How did she come to be fond of ye?"

Jonathan shifted his feet in noisy uneasiness.

"It commenced with the Foresters' picnic, three years ago."

"Where did ye used to see her?"

"At Coney Standish's old cottage, along the North Road."

The blow was a heavy one ; but Rushout never winced. All outward signs of his agitation had vanished.

"Ye might have let me have the mare," Jonathan went on, powerless to keep back the bitter thought that lay uppermost in his mind.

"How often did ye use to meet her?" asked Rushout, entirely ignoring the other's remark.

Jonathan paused to consider.

"On Mondays and Fridays, mostly."

A sudden thought struck Rushout.

"Did she go there that time I was away at my father's funeral?"

Jonathan nodded.

For a long time they remained silent, as if oblivious of each other's presence. Of a sudden Rushout looked up; from around his eyes all the blood had retreated, leaving broad, white rings, and making a deep-toned patch of red on either cheek. He seemed to have come to some great resolution, for the whole expression of his face was different.

"Jonathan Hays," he said solemnly, "there'll not be room for both of us."

The farmer did not answer. And there was nothing in his face to reveal whether he had heard.

This time the silence was longer than ever, then Rushout continued:

"I'll be at Helton cross-roads at ten."

Jonathan slowly uncrossed his legs, and walked to the door. And, as he crossed the threshold, he blurted out:

"Ye'll find me there.

VII

After the darkness of night had descended, savage gusts of wind started to sweep across the country, mysterious-looking, clad in tatters of ghostly white. And the myriad snow-flakes, which had ceased awhile previously, appeared again, fleeing before the wind; the big trees moved their limbs as if racked with pain; the little trees writhed, taking queer, fantastic shapes.

Inside the "Bear," each time that the wind passed in its frenzied passage down the village street the windows rattled, and the smoke burst into the room from under the mantelpiece in dense puffs, as if it shrank from facing the storm outside. Rushout raised the tumbler to his lips, unsteadily, knocking the edge of the glass against his chin.

The hands of the slow-ticking clock pointed to close upon ten. Presently he must set off to meet Jonathan at the cross-roads. He was quite hazy as to what would happen there; but he had a vague notion that something was to be settled

between them—and, indeed, he cared but little. Jonathan had wronged him, and the consciousness of injury begat a spirit of quarrelsomeness within him amounting to pugnacity, fitfully violent.

The rush of the wind gave way to a crooning wail of distress: the window shook furiously in its casement. Too stupefied to heed the storm, he added some more spirit to his glass.

It was half-past ten before he had put on his great-coat and crammed his hat all awry on to his head. He stepped into the street and immediately the blinding force of the wind and driven snow struck him: he tottered, and only kept on his legs by clutching at the wall. Catching at his breath he paused. His senses were sufficiently dulled to render him indifferent to the cutting cold of the blast and the icy wet of the snow: besides, the strain of maintaining a foothold demanded all his attention.

By the parapet of the bridge he halted, hopelessly struggling to rally his faculties. The strangeness of the storm completed his bewilderment. Behind him, out of the blackness, trooped the multitude of

snow-flakes : in front of him, back into the blackness, they disappeared. Where was he? Had he crossed the bridge? Then he knew that the night air had made him drunk. It was a vague sense of unfulfilled purpose that roused him again—he must avenge the memory of Jane. And he started forward once more. He crossed the bridge and even mounted the ascent on the other side, though the journey took him a long time.

Now the cold was beginning to penetrate him. The cross-roads were scarcely a hundred yards distant ; but he was completely ignorant of his whereabouts. Then his foot tripped against something, and he floundered headlong in the snow.

* * * * *

" I jest catchéd seet o' him, leein' all o' a heap by t' road-side : ef I had'na stoppéd he'd ha bin leein' there yet," said the carter.

" Lift him on to the sofa—here," called the ostler. " Get your arms under him—now then."

" He be na featherweight," the carter remarked, as they deposited the body.

"However did he come there?" asked the maid.

The three figures stood grouped together. The carter's lantern was on the table: there was no other light.

"Light one of them candles; let's have a look at him," said the ostler.

The maid did so.

But the draught blew the flame to a tiny spark.

"Shut the door—the outside door. Hark to the wind!"

"There's a nasty place on his forehead," said the carter.

"Ye'd best run for the doctor," suggested the maid.

The ostler went out.

"He be jest stupified-like," remarked the carter. "I reckon I'll loose him at t' throat."

Five minutes later Dr. Wilkinson was in the room, directing the two men how to carry him upstairs to bed. And when that was done, the carter went on his way.

VIII

All traces of the snow were gone; the sun glinted warm on the house-tops opposite; inside, a red hot fire was piled up in the little room behind the bar, and before it, extended in his accustomed arm-chair, lay Rushout. His half-grown beard transformed his whole physiognomy, veiling the coarseness of it here, adding vitality to it there. Since his illness the ruddiness of his face had paled considerably. After the fever-tossed delirium had come the gentle lassitude of convalescence.

Mary was bustling about the room, retailing divers scraps of village gossip which had accumulated during the past fortnight.

"And Mr. Hays, too," she was saying, "he's been in most every day to ask how ye was doin'. I bid him come upstairs many a time; but he was frightened to disturb ye. He'll be around this afternoon sure; I told him ye were for coming downstairs."

Unreal, shadowy as a dream, the past—the

storm, the white snow, the slippery road, the story about Jonathan and Jane—came back to Rushout. Jonathan and Jane—his thoughts lingered over them—not angrily, not bitterly, not sadly. His bodily weakness rendered his emotions indolent, and this indolence precluded any feeling but that of passive good-will. Only he wondered lazily concerning it all.

Then he heard the triple slam of the swing door outside, and Jonathan was before him.

"There, Mr. Hays," cried the girl, "ye see he's come downstairs after all."

"Jonathan, I'm downright glad to see ye," Rushout found himself saying, and just for an instant it seemed a little odd that he should speak so.

The farmer gripped him by the hand with unfeigned cordiality; as their eyes met his red beard and pale face looked at once strange and familiar.

"I scarce should ha' known ye, Richard, the beard makes ye look different." And he seated himself opposite, adding:

"Mary, jest a drop of Scotch—the same that I had yesterday."

"What's your opinion of the spirit?" asked Rushout."

"It's just to my taste. Ye'll be feelin' feeble-like?"

"Ay, I do a bit."

"It was a close touch of it ye had."

"I reckon it was."

"By God! it was a wild night."

Richard shot across an inquisitive glance, but he did not speak. And simultaneously there appeared to both of them a vision of the dead woman—to Jonathan clear-cut and living, to Richard half-effaced by time. And each remembered that she had belonged to the other, and, at that moment, they felt instinctively drawn together: each was conscious of a craving to talk about her, to hear the other mention her name. All this was keener with Jonathan, hence it was he who began:

"Richard, she *was* a grand woman."

"That she was—sich splendid hair."

"Nay, but t'was her eyes that were the finest."

"Black—jet-black."

"Did you ever take notice of the lashes?"

"And a dresser—more style than any lady. And the cleverest understander of horseflesh!"

Here they paused.

"Richard," Jonathan began again at last in an altered tone, "the white mare's gone lame."

"Lame!" Rushout sat of a sudden upright as he repeated the word after him. "Lame!"

"It's a nasty strain on t' hind fetlock. The doctor says she's been kickin' in the stable."

"Stuff and nonsense," Rushout retorted angrily. "Kickin' in the stable—she's as quiet as a sheep. He's been drivin' of her too hard, that's what it is. A hammerin' of her over the stones. He isn't fit to sit behind her."

"I'm goin' to put her out to grass."

"Ye goin' to! But the doctor? Isn't he for usin' of her?"

"He's parted with her. He reckoned she would na stand his work."

"And it's ye that have bought her?"

Jonathan assented.

Rushout reflected, then:

"Jonathan, I'm powerful glad. I've always

regretted ye didn't have her first. I reckon Jane would ha' sooner that ye had her, if she was to go."

"And to mind that on her death-bed she bade ye be tender with the animal. I'd ha' given most anything for her to ha' kept sound," returned Jonathan reproachfully.

"Ay, I know ye would," answered Rushout repentantly.

Yet a moment later he began again:

"D'ye mind how wild she was the day I was for lettin' young Will Dykes drive the mare?"

"That I do."

"Were ye sweet on her then?" he put the question in hesitating timidity.

"'Twas the first occasion I had a kiss from her," answered Jonathan, defiantly.

"When was that?"

"Whilst ye were fetchin' the new skin rug."

* * * * *

"What made ye fix on that old house of Coney Standish's?"

"I canna rightly say. There was a great amount o' reasons—it's a long tale. Yet I don't know but

what I've any objection to relating it to ye. I reckon it'd be best out."

"Ay, ye're right. Ye know I bear ye no malice. Hold on though till the girl fetches me a drop more of this barley-drink. It's grand coolin' stuff when ye're feverish."

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

I

"WHY don't you say at once that you hate me? Of course you do. What have you to do with a poor, broken-down devil like me?" and the concentrated exasperation of his sneer was ugly.

He stood planted on the hearth-rug, his face flushed, and a swollen vein standing out across his forehead. He had finished speaking, and there was silence in the room now; yet the figure of the girl opposite remained motionless. Seated in the far corner of the room, she was but an indistinct mass of shadow, for the feeble light of the shaded lamp did not reach her.

There was no freshness on the man's face—the battered skin, wrinkling at every corner, was stretched as loosely as an old man's, and hung in folds under the chin; the hair, scanty on the

temples, was here and there strongly streaked with grey; but the moustache, with its slender waxed points, was coal black, and the frame, despite the stoop in the shoulders, had all the spontaneous elasticity of youth. Fifty or thirty? Which was nearer the mark?

Duncan Ralston had lived a long time in India. Those in England who had known him before he had gone out as a young subaltern, freshly commissioned, talked vaguely of his brilliant bravery in the Afghan War, though no one could say exactly the manner in which he had distinguished himself. Then, about three years ago, selling out under apparently disadvantageous conditions, he had come home for the first time. When he appeared in London, some said that the climate had aged him strangely; but others, who knew him better, hinted that hard living had done as much as unhealthy heat. Now and then there were ugly rumours of a scandal with the wife of a Government officer up at Simla; but since no one spoke with certainty on the subject, they never attained any definite form.

After a minute or two, the girl came and stood

by his side before the fire, stretching out one foot towards the grate. The flickering light which played about her face revealed that the violence of his words had not affected her self-possession; there was only a tired, weary look, as if she had played the same scene many times before, and it palled upon her.

Her hair was drawn into a single coil on the top of her head, and her black evening dress revealed her warm-tinted throat and breast and her delicately modelled arms: she wore no ornament of any kind, and this enhanced the purity of her charm. Though she stood almost as high as he did, she was little more than a child.

The contrast between the two was a violent one, the man, with infinite possibilities of one kind in the past, the girl with infinite possibilities of another kind in the future.

And to Duncan the sight of her seemed to bring the bankruptcy of his own life very near at hand. Gradually the hardness went out of his face, all his anger fading as it had come, quickly. A glance of almost abject self-abasement and he laid one hand

on her bare shoulder, while with the other he lifted her fingers to his lips, slowly, almost reverently.

"I'm sorry, Pearl," and he kissed her fingers again; "I couldn't help it.

But on her part there was no movement in response to his, passive with the same dreary look she let her arm fall limp to her side again; and he, all occupied with his own emotion, noticed nothing.

Duncan Ralston was a ruined man. Eighteen months ago he had fancied himself within a few days of the crash; yet, week after week, month after month, he had managed to stave off the disaster, till he accepted his difficulties as a natural part of his life, and, a victim to the almost incredible blindness of self-deception, imagined that, sooner or later, by some means or other, he would emerge from them all. Perhaps, but for his passion for Pearl, despair would have taken the place of this reckless hopefulness; perhaps it was her presence alone that encouraged him to go on living. Yet it was only occasionally that he resented, as he had done just now, that she made no pretence of

returning his love, and it was very rarely that the whole extent of his degradation betrayed itself in her presence. The scattered remnants of a craving for religion or its equivalent, which years of loose living had not been able to eradicate, had centred themselves in his worship of her, so that there were moments when he could have knelt down before her, and prayed to her as a child prays to God. Once, nay twice, when he was absolutely penniless, she had given him money to go on gambling with, and on each occasion her money had brought him remarkable runs of luck. Hence there grew up in his mind a superstition that when the worst came, she would be there to save him, and this superstition was a source of considerable comfort to him in his worst moments of dread.

In the beginning, when his passion for her was purely selfish, he had determined to become her lover, cost what it might; but as, with each fresh batch of losses, he sank deeper and deeper into the mire, the reality of this resolve dwindled, and now the idea, had it been put before him, would have seemed little short of sacrilege. The fierce-

ness with which the passion for gambling—become of late an almost nightly struggle for existence—had fastened upon him, had chastened his love for Pearl, making of it a haven wherein all the better part of his nature took refuge; and he had enough moral sense left to recognise his own enslavement.

"Pearl," he said in a low voice, "can you let me have another hundred? I must have it," he went on, speaking more rapidly. "I haven't five pounds left, and I must play to-night. Your husband's banking, and it's my last chance."

"Simon's banking?" she murmured after him. She spoke with a foreign accent that made the words very musical. "Simon's banking," and a change came over her face, whether of anger, or of dread, or of pain, it would be difficult to say.

She crossed the room, and unlocking a drawer, handed him some notes.

He took them, counted them, and gave her in return a long look of hungry gratitude.

Pearl went back to her old position before the fire, gazing vacantly into the flames.

"I shall come to-morrow," said Duncan, briskly, moving towards the door.

"Yes, come to-morrow," she answered absently.

The door shut. She was alone. And, as the twilight creeps over the earth, steadily, stealthily, a feeling of loneliness crept over Pearl. Everything grew greyer and greyer, blacker and blacker. She was ignorant of the reason for her gloom, and indeed it would have been vain for her to attempt to arrive at its subtle and complex causes. There was, too, at the back of it all, a sense of uneasiness, the dread of some nameless disaster. "Simon's banking to-night," she repeated to herself, and at once the dread doubled in intensity. Then the reaction. How often had she not felt like this before, and there had been nothing? Besides, after all, what did she know? perhaps it was all right. Yes, it must be all right. But, as if by command, a crowd of incidents leapt up in her memory to remind her of the truth of her suspicion. To speak to him about it never occurred to her; to implore him to give up playing was more than she would have dared. Once or twice indeed she had thought

of it, but almost immediately, appalled at her own audacity, she had rejected the idea. For how could they live? He could not work, that was out of the question. Besides had he not saved her? Did she not owe everything to him? And for the fiftieth time the conflict between right and wrong distracted her, till from sheer weariness she gave it up, as she had done many times before. Already eight o'clock, why was he not yet back?

* * * * *

Three years, and several months of the fourth year had come and gone, since that early morning when Simon Alvary, on his way home, after a heavy night at the *Cercle du Mont d'Or*, Nice, was attracted down a narrow side street by a sound of muffled moaning. The figure of a man was stooping over a black mass lying in the roadway. It was a girl crouching all huddled in a heap on the cobbles, her elbows raised across her face to protect her eyes. The man was hitting at her with a piece of rope. As Simon came up, he paused before swinging the rope above his head and bringing it down heavily on the girl's neck. In an instant

Simon's gloved fist was in his mouth, the fellow reeled and dropped with an incoherent oath. The girl lay on a moment; but presently, surprised that the blows had ceased, she cautiously lowered her arms. Next she crawled up to the groaning body of her assailant, and when she saw the blood trickling from his mouth, she whispered hoarsely to Simon:

"*Merci, monsieur. Il allait me tuer si vous n'étiez pas venu. Merci,*" then turned over in a faint face downwards.

Simon ran for a cab, took her home in it to his lodgings, sent for a nurse from the hospital, and the best doctor in the town, gave her his own bed, and slept that night on a sofa in the dining-room. It was three weeks before she was able to get up again, and during that time he did everything that could be done for her, waiting on her himself, as anxiously and as tenderly as if she were his own child. Two nights even when her fever was running dangerously high, he was absent from the card room of the *Cercle*, though the luck was with him, and he had been winning largely.

He made cautious inquiries and discovered that

the man from whom he had rescued her was her father, an *ancien professeur de lycée*, whom absinthe was fast driving into the gutter. This and the fact that he led his daughter a dog's life was all that Simon could learn, for the man was not a native of the town, and the day after the encounter he disappeared—either afraid that he would be arrested for ill-treating his daughter, or anxious to take the opportunity of ridding himself of her.

Meanwhile Simon was exercising the faculty for secretiveness, which in him amounted almost to genius, inducing the doctor, the nurse and the *concierge*, all, by different means, to keep their tongues from wagging, so that the incident was kept absolutely quiet. And since for certain reasons it was necessary, that his life, when he was not at the *Cercle* or locked up by himself as was his wont for a certain number of hours each day, should be as retired as possible, afternoon upon afternoon he would relieve the nurse by her bedside, smooth her pillows, mix her medicines, shift her poultices, and often, when she grew stronger, read aloud to her in his hard, English voice, chapters from a dog's-eared

copy of the *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, which he found lying in the room.

At first this playing the nurse amused him, varying as it did the forced monotony of his life; after a while, as the fascination for her blanched, child-like face and of the big, brown-ringed eyes, wide open in wondering gratitude, grew, he came to regard her as belonging to him absolutely. This sense of proprietorship was especially pleasant—he liked to think of that straight, clean blow—he had never delivered a better—by which she had come into his possession; and of her hundred and one charming little ways of showing her gratitude, not one jarred upon him. From the moment when she had first realised what he had done for her, she had started to worship him, with a sort of wondering superstition, telling herself that he had been sent by Providence to save her. This idea when she told it to him charmed him and strengthened the bond between them. The first morning that she was well enough to leave the house, it occurred to him that he should like to keep her, so with the promptitude of action that was habitual with him, he took her

back with him to London. It was not till a full year later that he had consented, with a smile of good-humoured indulgence, to go through the marriage ceremony with her. For months before this they had been living as man and wife, and any ratification had seemed to him quite superfluous.

This was the story of their marriage—a strange enough binding together by chance of two individualities.

Pearl—for so Simon always called her, though her real name was Marie—was now nineteen, ripening every day from a quaint, winsome child into a finely built beautiful woman. The cowed look had gone from her face—or rather it had developed into an air of delicious gravity, the mysterious thoughtfulness of one for whom the task of living had some hidden meaning.

The many months of their life in common had dulled but little the vividness of her gratitude to Simon. She had felt that the least she could do in return for what he had done for her was to give herself up to him, body and soul, studying all his tastes and habits that she might the more easily

merge in them all her own desires and aspirations. And this she had accomplished with no ordinary single-mindedness, till her submission was so complete that he was never aware of it. Yet, in spite of it all, there was not that close sympathy between them which would have made of this sense of duty a source of joy.

Simon was kind to her—more than kind to her—just as he had always been. Ah! that was it, it was the perpetual monotony of his kindness that at times maddened her, stirring up within her a fierce desire to break out into bitter reproaches against him. She was conscious of a distantness in his indulgence towards her, that he was consta tly "thinking apart" from her, as if he were never quite off his guard in her presence. It was not of a sudden that this impression had flashed upon her, it had grown up, built bit by bit from the observation of subtle changes of manner, look, tone. And yet, strong as the temptation to pour out her heart to him was, an indefinable dread had up till now prevented her from yielding to it.

Once she had imagined that it was the memory,

of some other woman over which he was brooding; but something—what she had forgotten—banished this idea from her mind.

Then appeared the suspicion, which at certain moments crystallised itself into a certainty—it was the card-playing. Wherever they went, London, Paris, or the various fashionable resorts on the Continent—and they were constantly moving from one place to another—Simon played. Even this she did not learn all at once; for when he started out late at night, he never volunteered where he was going. At first in the full flush of her gratitude she had given but little thought to this, the idea that he was playing for large sums never entered her head. But once, when he came back in the middle of the night, she watched him, as she lay in bed, take from the pocket of his ulster a leather bag, and lock it away in a drawer of the writing-table. And as he carried it across the room she heard the muffled chink of money. When the morning came, and he was still sleeping heavily, she slipped out of bed and, unlocking the drawer, loosened the string round the mouth of the bag. Inside lay

gold and silver, and a bundle of papers—notes? —yes, notes. The sight of all this money—thousands of francs, as it seemed to her—scared her. Hastily she tied up the bag again and, locking the drawer, crept back into bed.

After this, though she had never dared say a word to him about it, she began to spy upon him. She had always taken for granted that he possessed *rentes*—the word to her meant something at once vague and reassuring. How much she had never stopped to calculate; but that it must be a good deal she felt sure, for they always lived at the best hotels, and he gave her more money than she knew how to spend.

Now, frequent spyings on the writing-table drawer made her understand that all the money he gave her came from the card-playing, and that he had nothing but what he brought home at nights.

At the beginning of the third year after their marriage they went back to London, to the set of rooms in a little hotel near King's Cross, where he had first taken her. This was a great change from the lavish living to which he had accustomed her

on the Continent; but meekly she accepted as final his curt explanation—they must reduce their expenditure.

For a whole fortnight he never once went out at night-time; but after eleven o'clock, when she had gone to her bed-room, he would remain by himself in the sitting-room till past midnight.

Now, since the solitude of her life caused every trivial incident to assume the proportions of an important event, this change in his habits inflamed her curiosity to fever heat. Seated on the bed, or standing in the doorway of the bed-room she would wait listening. Presently a scraping as of the gentle turning of a key. Then for a long while, sometimes an hour, sometimes two hours—nothing—only the movements of the other inmates of the house as they retired for the night. At last the scraping sound again and his tread in the passage.

One night she had worked herself up into such a state of nervous excitement concerning this mystery that she stole out in her stockinged feet to listen at his door. All was still. What could he be doing? She put her eye to the key-hole. Yes, there! he was

sitting at the table. There was no one else in the room. He was muttering to himself then. What was he doing with his hands? Cards? Yes, cards! He was lifting them from a heap in the middle of the table, and was scattering them over the table. For a long while she remained watching breathlessly, till the draught against her eye became very painful: stealthily she slunk back again.

From that moment the great suspicion lived with her, at times attaining the definite proportions of a certainty, at times fading to the indistinctness of a blurred shadow.

Not long after this the little hotel saw them no more. They had moved to a house in Maida Vale. And here, excepting a month spent in Paris towards the end of the last year, they had been ever since. In reality her life remained as retired as before, though outwardly it was much less so. There came to the house a certain number of men—yet with not one of them did she feel she had anything in common. It was certainly not their low standard of taste before which she recoiled, for many of the chance acquaintances with whom she had been

thrown on the Continent could boast of but little refinement, but rather as if a portion of her husband's secretiveness had communicated itself to her, teaching her to retreat more and more within herself. To Duncan Ralston alone was she at all accessible; but even with him it was little more than a passive tolerance of his presence, partly on account of his dog-like devotion to her, partly because the pathos of his wrecked life touched her sentimentality.

And so he was with her constantly. And Simon, reticent as usual, made no comment: only when he remembered the soundness of her fidelity, he smiled inwardly, and the smile was entirely pleasant.

Women friends she had none. Barely half a dozen acquaintances—the wife of an actor in whose house (next door) she had met all the others—mostly mere names.

* * * * *

"Well, Pearl, how are you?"

A rotund figure, insignificant in height, but sturdily built, curly, black hair, no moustache or

beard, a healthy pink and white complexion, the eyes small and metallic, the mouth thin-lipped, the chin full and heavy. But for his voice, a hard, mechanical voice, with no modulation of tone, the last word sounding the same level note as the first, he would have seemed a mere boy. And when he spoke every feature of his face remained impassive, as if he had no consciousness of what he was saying. Thus the first impression that Simon Alvary conveyed was one of well-fed, crass stupidity. But to Pearl he was the all-important centre of her tiny world; and the hardness of his voice—of course she had never heeded it, for it had always been the same.

As he came in she ran towards him, saying impulsively.

"Oh! I thought you were never coming."

"Poor little Pearl!" and he patted her on the cheek. "Has it been very dull all the afternoon? Well, little woman, you shall have a treat this evening, and we'll go to the theatre."

"*Chéri*," she answered, nestling her head on his shoulder.

Presently he moved away from her, arranging his white tie, which she had crumpled, in the mirror.

"By the way," he said (his back was still turned towards her), "just give me back those notes I gave you yesterday. I shall want them to-night. You shall have them again in the morning."

"Give you them back!" she repeated.

He said nothing, only went on straightening his tie.

"I—I haven't got them."

"Haven't got them? Haven't got them? What have you done with them?" His voice was a tone louder, and every syllable sounded with ruthless distinctness.

"Where are they?" he repeated, facing her.

"I—I gave them away—to Ralston," she faltered.

His face was unmoved, but he snapped his fingers once or twice, and this movement, which she knew, made her still more frightened.

"What did he want them for?" he went on.

"For to-night—he said it was his last chance—I am so sorry—forgive me—*je ne savais pas.*"

"*Sotte*," was all his reply.

She burst into tears.

"*Je ne savais pas*," she cried.

"It's no good making a fuss. But this is the last time."

"*Je te jure*," she interrupted.

"All right. Now let's come to dinner. Stop! How often have you done this before?"

"Twice. Once a long time ago, and once after we came back from Paris." She answered him eagerly, hoping by the fulness of her confession to atone for her fault.

"How much?"

"Twenty the first time, and fifty the second."

"Was that the fifty I gave you on your birthday?"

"Yes."

He laughed a short, contemptuous laugh, and then they went in to dinner.

II

It was half-past twelve before Simon entered the card-room of the Athenian Club. Still and

silent stood the shapeless mass of figures which crowded the far end of it. So still, so silent, that the ticking of the clock was distinctly audible. Then, suddenly, the brutal outburst of a fierce gabbling of voices, incoherent and indescribable, and the crowd started to sway to and fro, feverishly.

Simon handed his overcoat and crush hat to an attendant, leisurely bit the end from a cigar, and sauntered up to the table ; that quick glance of his scanning the crowd, it flashed across his face and was gone. But so high ran the game that no one heeded his arrival. It was indeed a full night—not only was every seat round the oval table occupied, but on both sides they stood huddled together, two or three deep, some grey-headed, some bald ; some stout and horsey-looking ; some boyish, beardless and flashily dressed ; some with dark skins, coarse lips and hooked noses ; some insignificant like the people one meets every day in the street, a few in evening dress, several with their hats on ; most smoking cigars or cigarettes ; each and all craning over the table and the disorder of counters,

white, gilt, and silvered, which lay strewn up and down it.

Simon stepped on to the daïs which skirted the room, and stood there, a little apart, stolid and expressionless, revealing nothing of the quickening glow that was stealing over him—the deliciously exhilarating glow of fine expectation, coupled with a sense of entire satisfaction with himself.

"Gentlemen, please make your stakes."

(The chink of counters, accompanied by a shower of the disjointed remarks which form the gambler's ritual.)

"*Rien ne va plus*," called a voice.

"Cards?"

"Cards?"

"Six," and a fresh outburst of hubbub drowned the voice of the banker.

Simon was not a constant visitor at the Athenian—the scene of his operations was usually laid elsewhere—most of the faces were unknown to him; yet he was at once conscious from the demeanour of the crowd that something unusual was taking place. But the gap in the wall of bodies surround-

ing the table was now closed, and, from where he was, he could see nothing of what was going on.

"Hulloa; good evening." It was Duncan.

Simon nodded shortly, and after a pause:

"The bank's low."

"A devil of a run," the other answered excitedly. "The German started at three hundred and was broke in half an hour. This chap took one at five hundred and he's only been on about ten minutes."

At that moment the voice of the croupier was heard.

"Gentlemen, there are only twenty-three pounds in the bank."

A sullen murmur of grumbling, a reckless laugh or two, not a few astonished oaths, an expansion of the crowd, and a noise of the shifting of chairs as the punters rose from their seats. The buzz of conversation swelled till it filled the room, there was a popping of corks, and waiters, armed with glasses, glided in and out of the various groups. The croupier was sweeping away the mess of cards by his side; gazing at him absently, bald and flabby-faced, sat the banker. Presently, however, he swept

the little pile of counters before him into the palm of his hand, rose and was lost in the crowd. It was the merchant Stendermann.

The buzz of conversation flagged and rose, flagged and rose again. The croupier had cleared the table, and now was idly examining a crack in his rake.

So the minutes slipped by. But the chairs remained untenanted. No one would risk another bank. A few anxious-looking punters, excited by their gains, were wandering restlessly about, others were moving towards the door, a group was forming round a couple of *écarté* players, who had just seated themselves at the other end of the room.

Simon was biding his time ; he loved to toy with the temper of the crowd. At last he stepped forward and, without a word, seated himself in the banker's chair. Instantly there was a rush for seats at the table ; those who were on the point of going divested themselves of their overcoats ; the two *écarté* players were left almost alone.

"A thousand," he said, throwing a bundle of notes on the table. The croupier ran his fingers

through them with the precision of a bank clerk, and the light from the chandelier glinted on the counters which he poured on the table in return.

Then he began to dexterously churn together the six packs of cards. Simon, calling for a match, relit his cigar, disguising with admirable skill his keen scrutiny of the punters. On his right sat Duncan, the swollen vein standing out across his forehead as it always did when he was excited—meddling fool!—he at least should go to bed that night with empty pockets; next to him, a hollow-cheeked, filmy-eyed fellow, whose straggling black beard he remembered having seen before in other gaming rooms; beyond, three young "bloods" in evening dress, all chattering in noisy excitement over their winnings off the last two banks. (Simon's eye lingered almost lovingly on this little group, and he observed that two more of the same party stood behind.) Of the punters seated on the other side of the table, three at least, by the quiet determination of their demeanour, were players of calibre, and, next the croupier, a seedy-looking individual, whose fingers were tremulously sorting

his small pile of counters—a broken-down specimen, tottering on the brink, without one of which at least no gaming-room is complete. Ah! there in the crowd behind, the fat Stendermann (he had come back then)—a noble loser he, for, during Simon's last visit to Paris, had the merchant not written him out a cheque for seventeen hundred without a murmur after an hour's piquet!

A few minutes later the game was in full swing. Simon had not yet begun to work; as yet he was only playing. For fine as was the pleasure of controlling chance, he was epicure enough to render it quite exquisite by a period of preliminary deliberation. Playing was to him what the *hors-d'œuvre* is to the glutton—and what are the joys of the gambler compared with the joys of the Greek? Besides, in spite of, or rather on account of, the previous runs against the bank, all were staking in small sums, except the three young "bloods" in the corner, and Stendermann, who threw down a heap of ten-pound counters before each deal. Nothing makes the veteran gambler so cautious as heavy winnings.

As yet there were no signs of a run. The hesitation of the cards, declaring first in favour of the punters, then in favour of the bank, had been up till now almost complete, as if, conscious that the struggle had not begun in real earnest, they feared to commit themselves to one side or the other. It was nearly five weeks since Simon had had the chance of a serious game at the Athenian—one of the few clubs open to him where the banker was allowed to handle the cards. Hence the ridiculous proportion of the stakes to the amount of his bank irritated him, or rather provoked that almost imperceptible ruffling which was all he ever allowed himself to indulge in. He determined to raise them by a method all his own, which, though dangerous, was rarely unsuccessful. Waiting till the cards were almost exhausted, he called for three fresh packs. Directly they were placed on the table, he exchanged them, all but the last dozen or so, for a "poultice" which he carried concealed in his waistcoat pocket. In this "poultice" every figure-card, every eight, every nine, and a quantity of combinations making up these two numbers

were delicately cogged, so that by passing his fingers along the edges of the pack, he could at once detect their whereabouts. Next, he proceeded to "slip" in favour of the punters five "naturals,' three to one side and two to the other. The manœuvre cost him over a hundred pounds, but it accomplished his object. At the beginning of the tenth deal there was more money on the table than there had ever been before, and henceforward with each deal the stakes rose higher and higher. The blood of the players was warmed. He could now begin to work. Yet for a while he continued to dally with the game; that was the weak spot in his strength. How he loved to refine upon the thrill that the consciousness of his power sent through him. So, if he still led the punters on, first to the right, next to the left, it was only to render the joy of plundering them in the following deal all the more acute. The preliminary operation of deposing the "poultice" successfully accomplished—and in truth, for him, this was no difficult feat—all was secure; for the indentations on the cogged cards were so delicate as to be invisible to the naked

eye, and imperceptible to any but his exquisite touch. So absolute was his control over the cards, that any moment he could have dealt fifteen "naturals," or fifteen baccarat hands running, had he been so minded. His whole being was concentrated on the game, and he made no attempt to disguise it. The assumption of carelessness, or of nervousness, of high spirits, of loquacity, of bluster, or of extreme civility—the hackneyed devices of a modern Greek—he scorned them all. For to-night at least, he was on a higher plane; he could afford to dispense with them; no salad-shuffle, no churning together of the cards, however conscientious, could impair his omnipotence.

Meanwhile Duncan, whirled along by the savage tide of the vice, won and lost, lost and won again in blind senselessness, only alive to the fluctuation of the pile of counters before him. Off the first two banks he had taken eighty pounds, and his madness wrought in his mind out of this sum the annihilation of all his difficulties. Tradesmen's debts, overdue promissory notes, miscellaneous

debts of honour, all vanished, lost to sight amid the magnificent vista of possibilities now stretching before him.

Before now, in a single night, men had won fortunes—fortunes, ay, fortunes large enough to enrich them for life. And he? Why not he? The luck was with him. And did not Pearl's money always bring him luck? The sight of the masses of counters strewn up and down the table fed the fierceness of his lust, intoxicating him, causing him to plunge more and more desperately. He was losing now, but a couple of "naturals," at the rate at which he was staking would right him again; then in real earnest he would start to break the bank. Alvary—little sleek-faced devil!—he had always hated him—he would break him yet, down to his last farthing. And when he had broken his bank to-night, he would dog him from gaming-room to gaming-room till he had stripped the very clothes from off his back. He sent a glance of hatred at the stolid, round face. Pearl, when he was rich, he would take her from him, and Alvary, he would kick him into the gutter. And, when all these things

were done, he would never touch a card again. He would settle down to enjoy life. Ha! there were two winning cards, and as the croupier pushed half a dozen counters towards him, the glow of self-sufficiency that accompanied the vision of a new life of unbroken enjoyment was as vivid as if it had been real. Yet he was losing again. Two "baccarat" hands shattered his castles in the air. His eyes ran rapidly over the counters—thirteen gilt ones, £130; eleven silvered ones, £155; about a dozen white ones. Barely two hundred. Damn these cursed cards!! Why he had only won twenty pounds on this bank.

Six and a figure card.

"Seven," sounded Alvary's clear voice.

While the croupier swept away five of his gilt pieces, Duncan gave vent to a smothered exclamation of fury, and the vein across his forehead swelled as if it would burst. He was a bad loser.

The next deal saw five more disappear. He swore a foul oath between his teeth.

"*Il faut savoir perdre, mon ami*," said Simon, his teeth g eaming

The blear-eyed owner of the straggling beard laughed nervously; but Duncan heard nothing.

The following hand was a winning one, but the next two, four and five against Alvary's seven and six, brought him back to where he was before. And for a while he plunged on, neither winning nor losing. Once he possessed at least half a dozen gilt counters, then a run of four losing hands in succession, and they were gone every one. A couple of five pound counters and a small heap of white ones were all that remained. With the caution of despair, he refrained from staking them all, pushing only the silvered ones over the line. Knave—six—thank God!

"Stand," he gasped.

"Seven," called Alvary.

And the last of the silvered pieces went to swell the mass in front of the banker. Unconscious of all around him, as if stunned by a heavy blow, he forgot to stake. In the agony of his despair, he was trying to recollect whether, when he had left her, Pearl was wearing the coral necklace he had given her. Then gradually his thoughts came back to

ness of his intoxication he had lost all self-control. It was with a clumsiness that was quite pathetic that he was cheating.

He noticed nothing. Alvary whispered to the croupier, the croupier to a man standing behind him; there was a hushing of the hubbub; the game suddenly flagged. But still he noticed nothing. He was staking three gilt counters on each deal now, increasing them to five if the cards were favourable. All fear of detection had vanished. He only knew that he was winning. It was as if some strange force within him were driving him on—as if he were performing some task, imposed upon him by some unknown authority. Half the room was watching him. But he was aware of nothing.

Yet for a while no one made any comment. Each shrank from being the first to speak. At last a nervous laugh, burst from one of the young bloods in the corner.

"I say, this is a bit too thick!"

The spell was broken. The storm burst.

"Good God!"

"Who is he?"

"What?"

"He must have been at it all night."

"I know him. Ralston—army man."

"No—retired."

"Kick him out."

"Yes, out with the skunk."

"The window!" yelled the young "bloods," leaping to their feet.

Then above the uproar, quelling it with its harsh imperious note, rang Alvary's voice:

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!"

By degrees there was silence. He was the banker. He had a right to be heard. They waited for him to speak.

"Let the poor devil go," was all he said.

"No, no."

"Out with him."

"Open that window," yelled a sallow-faced youth.

But from the other side of the room arose a murmur of dissent. Some of the older men made themselves heard.

"No violence."

"Shut the window."

"Don't shout."

And again every one began to speak at once, till the uproar grew quite incoherent. The sallow-faced youth was disputing violently with a man who was trying to shut the window.

"Now's your chance," said Alvary to Duncan. "Out you get."

But the wretched man sat limp, helpless, amid the storm that was raging around him.

"Come, man." And Alvary, gripping him by the shoulder, shook him. "They'll chuck you if you don't run for it."

"Here get him out of the way or those fellows over there will kill him, if they once get at him," called the fat Stendermann.

Duncan rose and two attendants, at a sign from Alvary, half pushed, half dragged him out of the room.

When those who were for summary measures learnt that he was gone—so great was the uproar that it was fully a minute before they did so—they shouted the louder.

"Who let the blackguard go?" howled the sallow-faced youth.

"I did, young man," thundered back Stendermann, shouldering his way through the crowd. The threatening attitude of the merchant's bulky frame had its effects on the other. Changing his tone considerably, he stammered:

"Why did you let him go?"

"Because we're not going to have an infernal shindy because some of you fellows can't play without getting drunk," interrupted Alvary. The contrast between the heat of his words and the coolness of his demeanour was very striking. The crowd was impressed, for, as he finished speaking, a chorus of approval went round the room.

"Drunk? What the ——? Who are you?" burst out the other.

"Look here, stop it," thundered the merchant, seizing him roughly by the arm, while two or three bystanders instantly put themselves menacingly between Alvary and his antagonist.

"There's been enough for one night," remarked one.

"Yes, the young idiot. What does he want?"

"Something to settle the drink inside him," facetiously answered a third.

Alvary stood, his face absolutely unmoved, waiting while the croupier counted his bank.

"Come, let's get out of it," said some one.

And there was a general move towards the door.

III

Pearl had not gone to bed. Outside the rain pattered against the window-pane; inside the fire was dying, slowly but surely. She wrapped the shawl closer about her shoulders; the book that lay on her lap glided on to the ground. And the rain beat against the window-pane a little louder than before.

After Simon had brought her back from the theatre, and, going out again into the night, had left her to herself, the old sinking sense of uneasiness had come upon her. Vain were all her attempts to beat it back. "It is only because I am unwell," she kept on insisting to herself. But against the

advance of the growing dread she was helpless. Waiting, waiting, waiting, listening for the sound of his key in the door, she sat on.

Her father! what had become of him? Dead—a round, green, nameless grave, or perhaps still alive, sitting in a dingy café, with the yellow-green drink before him Simon! oh, why did he not come?

Duncan! Was he winning to-night. Those notes! How angry Simon had been when he had snapped his fingers. What was he doing? Perhaps at this moment, now at this very moment, he was taking their money. Oh! why did he not come?

Ah! Stop! What was that? A noise—a knocking—muffled, as if something soft against the door. Ah! there it was again. What could it be? Simon! *It* had come then. She rushed into the hall and struggled to unfasten the door.

Outside the figure of a man. Not Simon—he was too tall. No hat, wet through, his clothes were clinging to his body

"Who are you? What do you want?" she gasped, hoarse with terror.

"It's me."

"Ralston. Oh! *comme vous m'avez fait peur! Que faites-vous la? Qu'est-il arrivé?* Speak, for God's sake! Come in out of the wet."

She seized his dripping sleeve and pulled him inside the door.

"Here, in here; there's a light here," as he stumbled in the dark.

She still held him by the sleeve. He dropped heavily into a chair. His matted hair clung close to his forehead: the water dripped from his fingertips on to the carpet.

"Simon—where is he? *Dites, je vous supplie!* Where is he? What has happened?"

He sent her back a dull stare: he had not understood.

"Speak! for the love of God, speak!" she cried. "Where is he?"

"He's—he's at the club," he answered, grasping her meaning with a visible effort.

"There's no danger. Nothing's happened to him?"

"Nothing's happened," he repeated mechani-

cally. "No, I suppose nothing's happened to him."

"But why are you so wet? Where's your hat? and your coat? See! your trousers are covered with mud."

"Are they?" he asked listlessly.

For an instant neither of them spoke. She, lost in wonder at his woeful appearance; he, stupidly examining the mud on his boots.

"Pearl, I'm done for at last!"

"Done for. How much have you lost? Are they all gone?"

"Lost! worse than lost. They all went. I had only five left, white ones. I tried to win, but—the cards were awful, I was mad—*poussette.* I couldn't help it; it was stronger than myself. At first I won, five times I think. Then they saw. I had to go out — into the street — pouring rain," and he shivered as he spoke the last words.

She tried to stir the dying fire to a flame.

"Come near," she said. "It's not a grand fire. You must take off those wet things. You'll catch cold."

"No," he answered, "leave it."

"And Simon? What did he do?"

"Simon? He won a great pile, I don't know how much."

"But when you were discovered?"

"He told me to go out. He and a big, fat man. Don't know his name. German, I think."

"But you mustn't sit in those wet things. You will kill yourself."

"I'm going home."

"Let me get you a coat."

"No, good-bye."

"Why good bye? *Au revoir, n'est pas?*"

"It's good-bye."

"What are you going to do? You're not going to——"

"No, I've thought of that; I'm going away, abroad. I shall start to-morrow. Good-bye."

"*Adieu.*"

An instant later, he came back and said, "Give me a couple of shillings to get home with."

She handed him her purse.

"Have you got any brandy open?"

She pointed to a decanter and glasses by the door.

He drank a wineglassful, greedily, as if it were water, then went out again, quickly, without looking behind him.

An instant later the hall door slammed, shaking the whole house.

And Pearl, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

In the distance a rattle of wheels, louder and louder—before the house it stopped. She ran to the window and, pushing aside the blind, peeped out. Through the murky atmosphere she perceived that it was a hansom cab. Bang! bang! the doors flew open. A man stepped out on to the footboard, and stood there, paying the driver. Simon! at last. Now he was opening the door! Now he was in the hall! She did not go to meet him.

There he was! To her surprise, he was unchanged. There was nothing unusual about him—his hair was unruffled, and his shirt-front was spotless and uncrumpled.

"Hulloa, little woman, not gone to bed!" The hard, toneless voice was the same as ever.

She made no answer.

"Has my little Pearl been sitting up all alone for me? But she mustn't do such silly things. Why it's nearly three o'clock." He put his arms on her shoulders, drawing her towards him.

A slight shudder ran through her; she wrenched herself away.

"*Ne me touche pas.*"

He stepped back, surveying her critically, puzzling for the reason of her anger.

"What's up?" he asked, not interrogatively, but rather to gain time.

Still she made no answer.

"Come," he said, taking both her hands in his and softening the hardness of his voice. "Come, you may as well tell me."

"*Je sais tout.*"

"Ah!" The exclamation was deep-drawn, but the slightly theatrical form of her reply had not escaped him. "That fellow has been here," he added rapidly.

She nodded, and something in that nod betrayed to him her weakness. There would be no battle, after all, he saw.

Instinctively, he divined what to do. Picking up the novel that lay on the floor, and holding it to the lamp, he turned over its pages. Presently his eye travelled to the mud on the carpet. His eyes blinked briskly, as he sought the interpretation of this sign ; as its meaning came there was an almost invisible twitching of his nostrils.

He turned and faced her. Their eyes met. He had calculated the strength of his influence. She made one step towards him, and threw both arms round his neck.

"*Simon, je suis si malheureuse?* she sobbed.

"There, there," he said soothingly, stroking her on the back. "Don't take it so to heart. Don't cry. There, *ma petite* Pearl. Why, you'll make your eyes all red. Now sit down here on my knee and tell me all about it."

He dropped into an armchair and drew her on to his lap.

"*Je t'aime*," she murmured, burying her face in his shoulder.

He sat quite still, waiting, till she should grow calmer. At last she lifted her head. He wiped away her tears and kissed her on both eyes. Then

with parted lips, he looked her full in the face. She smiled.

But immediately her face clouded again; the vision of Ralston's bedraggled figure had come back; but it had lost much of its vividness.

"Now tell me all about it," said Simon. "What did he want?"

"Nothing; he was wet through, and he had no hat—he said good-bye. He said he was going abroad. *Que deviendra-t-il? Dis?*"

"He'll find something to do. They always do."

"*Mais c'est affreux?*"

"Well, but if people will do these things."

"*Mais toi. C'est la même chose, n'est-ce pas?*"

"What do you mean?"

"*Oh! Je l'ai soupçonné depuis—oh! il y a bien des mois—dis, je t'en supplie. C'est vrai, n'est-ce pas? J'aimerais mieux savoir. Est-ce la même chose?*"

"You're hurting me—sit a little higher, more to one side. That's it. No, by Jove! it's not quite the same thing—not by a long chalk," and he laughed mirthlessly.

"*Mais tu gagnes toujours?*"

"And where would the little Pearl be if I didn't?'

This indirect reminder of all she owed him touched her; she drew a little closer to him.

"*Mais si tu gagnes toujours.*"

"Yes, I always take good care of that."

"*Le danger. Ces doit être terrible?*"

"No."

"*Mais lui.*"

"That's different. He lost his head."

"*Il n'y a pas de danger, alors.*"

"No, not for me."

"*Mais si tu étais découvert?*"

"I never shall." At the absolute decision in his voice, her face brightened. The movement was not lost upon him.

"Now, little woman, are you reassured?"

She did not answer, yet he could see the conflict within her was practically at an end.

"*Combien as-tu gagnè ce soir?*"

"Six hundred and thirty-four."

"Pounds?"

"Of course."

She caught her breath in astonishment

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed.

Then she looked up at him, and there was admiration in her eyes.

"You won't hide things from me now. Promise, when you are away, you will tell me what has happened—everything. Won't you? You can trust me. I swear you can trust me."

"Yes, *ma petite* Pearl. In the future you shall know everything. You shall be the banker and keep all the money for me. Would you like that?"

"*Oui.*" The word shot out quickly between her teeth.

"Six hundred and thirty-four pounds!" she repeated, half to herself. "How much is that in francs?"

"Nearly sixteen thousand."

"And my Pearl isn't angry any more?"

"*Je t'aime,*" she murmured in reply.

Their lips met.

EMBERS

THE room was small, but the twilight shadows made it appear larger. An iron bedstead; two tables, one covered with papers, the other with a white cloth; a chair by the door, and on it a mud-splashed pair of trousers and a dirty shirt, with a pair of old slippers, trodden down at the heels, underneath; a black, shiny armchair, its horsehair stuffing protruding in places; a deal chest of drawers—this was all the furniture. No kind of ornament, bare walls, not a spot of colour to relieve the cheerlessness.

Yet presently, as one looked, two or three details betrayed something of the individuality of the occupant.

The papers on the writing-table were arranged in neat stacks; the shirt on the chair had been carefully folded; the slippers lay side by side; but

it was the mechanical precision of habit, and not a love of tidiness ; for the room was far from clean, and looked almost squalid.

But when he came in, he noticed none of these things.

A lean young man, with a hesitating gait and tired stoop ; lank hair streaked with grey ; a yellow, parchment-like skin that puckered in wrinkles round the eyes, and gave a shrivelled look to the whole face ; and in the eyes a startling dulness.

He lit the little lamp with the green cardboard shade, hung up his hat and his overcoat behind the door, took off his boots and laid them together, just as he had done every evening for the last five years.

He lifted up the dirty shirt, and, after looking closely at the cuffs folded it again, and replaced it on the chair. Then he fetched a brush from off the chest of drawers, and began carefully to clean the mud-splashed trousers.

When he had nearly finished, the servant-girl brought in his dinner.

" Good evening," he said, without looking up.

" Good evening, Mr. Gorridge," she answered.

And he began to eat the cold mutton and the boiled potatoes methodically.

As a rule, when his dinner was finished, he seated himself at the writing-table, to copy manuscripts at a half-penny a folio or to address envelopes at fourpence a hundred. It was not so much for the sake of the money, for he had but few wants, and his salary was more than enough to supply them. He had taken to it long ago, when the mechanical work had kept him from brooding over his trouble; and gradually the habit had grown upon him, till it was an inseparable part of his existence. Narrower and narrower had become the groove in which his life ran, and now each day was a counterpart of the preceding one.

But to-night, when the servant girl had taken away the half-finished leg of mutton, he turned round his chair and stared into the empty grate.

February 18th, said the almanack on the wall opposite. February 18th, the day on which she had gone. With a yearning, dull and immense, like the yearning for home of the solitary traveller, he was thinking of his married life—quite hazily; for

five years of unconscious retrospective crystallisation had vaguely beautified them for him.

And then he lived over again the moment when he had come back from the City to find her gone, gone with not a word of explanation.

Most of that night and all the next day he had spent in wild search for her. The next three days he was in bed, unable to get up. On the morning of the fourth day, fearing to lose his place, he had dragged himself down to the City as usual. And afterwards, for weeks, every evening as he mounted the stairs, his heart thumped excitedly with the hope that he would find her back again. But she never came.

He changed his lodgings, for the hundred and one little things that brought her back to him made the rooms unbearable.

* * * * *

Outside, a drizzling rain. The gas lamps shone a dim, filthy yellow, streaking the slimy pavement with their reflections. There was no sky, only a murky atmosphere overhead. And save for a woman creeping along, the street was deserted.

Her slatternly clothes hung loosely about her; her skirt trailed in the mud. She was quite wet, for she had no umbrella.

Underneath his window she stopped, and for a moment she stood in the doorway out of the rain.

During that moment, the thoughts of the man in the little bedroom above, sitting staring into the empty grate, and the thoughts of the bedraggled figure in the doorway below, went out towards each other.

She could only think in a foggy sort of way, for she had already had a drink or two. There were many things which were blurred; many things about which she was not sure. Her recollection of their separation was dim; she scarcely understood how it had come about. She wondered feebly where he was, what he was doing. Yet her cunning instinct told her he would take her back, in spite of it all, and that once more she could do with him what she would. It seemed that they were together. He was so simple, so confiding, that during the day when he was down at the City, she did what she liked. She was careful, of course, so that he never found out anything.

Then she moved out again into the wet, and stumbled along towards the lights of the public-house at the corner.

* * * * *

It was inevitable that it would come, sooner or later, for she slept over the public-house at the end of the street, and he passed it every day on his way to the City. Yet it was several days before she saw him. When he went by in the morning, she was seldom out of bed, and when he came back in the evening, she was generally drunk.

But once she woke early, and looked out through the grimy window-pane.

There he was! She could see his back, as he hurried away down the street. But there was no mistaking the narrow, sloping shoulders, the jerky, nervous gait, with the head thrust forward. She even remembered the black overcoat; he had bought it just after their marriage. It used to be a shiny one, several sizes too large for him, and to hang in baggy wrinkles about the armpits. And she fell to dreaming, recalling vague, half-blurred little incidents.

He was found now. A quarter to nine. He was

on his way to the City; well she knew that, when evening came, he would return by the same way. All she had to do was to wait for him, and to keep her head clear. So back she went to her dirty bed and fell into a fitful sleep.

About three o'clock, with a low, sickly feeling, she awoke. But as she slipped into her tawdry garments, her spirits rose. This was the last day; to-morrow she would be a respectable married woman in comfortable lodgings, with a man to earn money for her. She went down to the bar, and ordered a large pewter of beer. She always lunched off a large pewter, never having any appetite till evening.

Presently two women, one of whom she knew, came in. She felt in her pocket. Half a crown. Her last. But what odds? To-morrow he would give her plenty more. So she recklessly stood drinks to the new-comers.

And thus through the afternoon, and with the idea that she must catch him on his return increasing in force as she grew more and more drunk.

She talked loudly and volubly, explaining to the two others all about him, and dilating on all the

things she would do when he had taken her back. They listened stupidly, nodding gravely at intervals.

About six o'clock they found themselves with no more money and with nothing more to drink, so, holding each other by the arm, they sallied forth into the street to wait for him.

* * * * *

He was hastening home, thinking of the bundle of manuscript which bulged his pocket, whether he would be able to copy it all before eleven, the hour when he always went to bed.

Of a sudden something clutching at his arm—a woman !—looking up into his face, with the glare of the gas-lamp lighting up her senseless leer. She did not speak, only leered the more, and hung heavier and heavier on his arm.

He made a half frightened, half indignant movement to shake her off. Next he recognised her. She did not know that he had done so, for he did not start, nor make any sound. Only first his features, then his whole body stiffened, till he stood as if petrified.

"Don't you know me Frank?" she stuttered

There was no reply, and it dawned upon her that he did.

"What are you looking so scared at? One would think you'd never seen me before," she continued with a sickly smile. "I'm not as I was, I know that. I've had a hard time of it, a cruel hard time of it," she whined; "but I've come back to be your dutiful wife once more," and she leered the same, senseless leer. "Where are your digs? Somewhere along this way, eh?" And pulling him by the arm, she dragged him down the street. His feeble resistance only lasted an instant.

When they reached the door, his hand shook so violently, that it was nearly a minute before he could fit the key into the keyhole. Automatically he lit the little lamp with the green cardboard shade, hung up his his hat and overcoat behind the door, and was about to take off his boots, when his eyes fell on her. With a start he stopped short.

She was lying in an armchair, looking round the room.

"No great shakes, this drawing-room of yours. Just you wait till I've been here a day or two, and see how I'll smarten it up. It's beastly cold and no fire."

At this moment the servant-girl came in to lay the cloth. On seeing the stranger, she stepped back, looking in astonishment from one to the other.

"Well, stupid, what are you staring at? Look sharp. I'm hungry. Let's see. Soup—soup to begin with. Fish, no, no fish—beastly smelly stuff, I can't stomach it. Tripe and baked potatoes to follow, and here, fetch a bottle of beer, look alive; don't stand there like a blasted lamp-post."

The servant-girl fled, slamming the door behind her. And the two relapsed into silence, he, standing staring at her, in terror-stricken rigidity.

Exasperated, she turned to him.

"What the devil's the matter with you? A nice way to receive back your loving wife, after all these years. Good God! man, you look like a blooming mummy!"

The door opened violently. In burst a heavy, stout woman, her face flushed with passion.

Now, Mr. Gorridge," she cried. "What's the meaning of this? I'm not going to stand it, d'ye hear? What are you looking so dazed at? Why, God bless my soul, I believe the man's off his head!" And raising her voice still louder: "Now then, hussy, clear out quick. What do you take me for, I should like to know? I've always kept a respectable house, and I ain't goin' to begin to have the likes of you about now!"

"Dry up your damned impudence," stuttered the other, staggering to her feet. "Why, I'm his lawful wife. We were married in church. I've been away on business, these last three years. And it's a hard time of it that I've had," and she wound up with a whine.

"Get out, you drunken beast," shouted the elder woman, "or if you don't I'll soon make you."

And, seizing her by the shoulders, she began to push her towards the door. The other kicked and struggled, but it was of no use. There was a scuffle on the staircase, an oath from the drunken woman, a crash as of something falling, and the front door banged.

"If you ever dare to set foot inside my house again," called the landlady through the door, "I'll send the police after you."

And, as she re-entered the room: "Mr. Gorridge, just you understand this, I'll have none of these goings on in my house. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, at your age."

But he lay in a heap in the armchair, staring fixedly into the empty grate.

Seeing that he paid no heed, she bounced out of the room with a snort of contempt.

Quite still he lay, his limbs huddled together, while the servant-girl, openly casting indignant glances at him, prepared his dinner.

Half an hour passed. The food was untouched. He had not moved.

'Ain't you going to have no dinner, Mr. Gorridge?" asked the girl, with a touch of compassion in her voice.

He made no sound, so she took away the things.

How long he had been there he did not know. He was cold; the cramped position had stiffened his legs; the lamp had gone out; it was quite dark.

He struck a match, and clumsily lit it again. Then, undressing, crept into bed.

* * * * *

When he awoke his mind was blank. Mechanically he looked at the chair on which his clothes always lay folded. It was empty. In a heap, there they were on the floor.

A quick spasm, contracting his features, and he remembered, and, with a gesture of indescribable weariness, began to dress. .

That day he did his work at the office as usual, only he looked more yellow and more wizened than ever. But no one noticed it.

In the evening, he no longer hurried along the street towards home, absently with his head thrust forward. Slowly he crept, with cautious, cat-like movements.

From a doorway, out burst a boy with a basket. He started aside like a frightened animal.

It was only when he had passed the spot where she had met him yesterday, that he seemed reassured. Quickening his pace, he fell again into his accustomed, jerky gait.

But presently, he caught sight of something coming in the distance. By instinct he knew that it was she. On he hastened, his eyes on the pavement, till they came face to face.

"Frank," she began in a voice broken by maudlin sobs, "don't you think that I'm going to bother you any more. I'm a miserable, lost creature. I know I am. I'll never trouble you again, Frank; only give me something to keep body and soul together. I haven't a blessed sixpence," here she stopped, watching him intently.

He had pulled out his purse, and was emptying its contents into his hand. Three half-crowns, a shilling and four coppers—he handed them all to her, and, without a word, turned to go in.

"Good-night, Frank my darling," she called after him. "You're a trump, you are."

* * * * *

The next three days passed, and she never appeared.

Back his life dropped into the old groove, till it all seemed like a bad dream, and sometimes he wondered whether it had really happened.

Then she met him again, with the same maudlin tears. He gave her a sovereign, for that morning he had received his salary.

After this she took to waylaying him almost every evening. Sometimes, he could only give her a copper or two, sometimes half a crown, sometimes—on Saturdays—gold. He scarcely ever spoke to her, and seemed relieved when she left him on the doorstep. Once she spoke of coming up.

"To-morrow is Saturday," he said in a hurried voice. She understood, and went away.

At the end of a fortnight, he was unable to pay his weekly bill. This was the first time since he had lodged there, and the thought gnawed him night and day.

His landlady said nothing, but when at the end of the second week no money was forthcoming, she grumbled sullenly.

And he began to age strangely, thinner and thinner his hair became, till he was almost quite bald.

* * * * *

. . . About three weeks later—night-time—the little street was black and still—on the doorstep, two figures.

"I am going on Saturday," said he.

"Going? Why? Where?" she answered.

"I can't pay the rent," he said simply.

Face to face they stood. In his eyes the vacant stare of complete weariness; in hers a look of silent suffering. Quicker and quicker her face quivered. Big tears rolled down her cheeks.

And as he watched her, his vacant stare passed away; in its place came the soft light of compassion.

"Don't cry, Mag," he said gently.

At the sound of this little pet name, coming again for the first time at the end of all these years, she broke down.

It was the hysterical sobbing of a ruined nervous system; it was very painful to hear.

"Don't cry, Mag," he repeated.

But she sobbed on, her frame rocking with convulsive throbs.

Bewildered he looked about him. Then timidly, he put his arm round her saying once more:

"Don't cry, little Mag."

By degrees the fit spent itself. She stood quite still at last, her head resting on his shoulder. After a moment, she stepped back and looked again into his eyes.

The features were quite composed, but the lips were bloodless.

"Frank," she said with an intenseness that revealed the tumult within. "Frank, will you forgive me?"

The old spasm of pain, contracting the features, came back.

She saw it.

"I don't mean that," she said hurriedly. "I'm too bad for that. Only say that you forgive me."

He pondered a moment perplexed, his eyes blinking rapidly.

Then looking at her, and seeing that she was waiting for his answer:

"I forgive you," he murmured.

Holding out her hand—"good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye," he answered mechanically.

And she stepped on to the pavement, and moved slowly away down the street.

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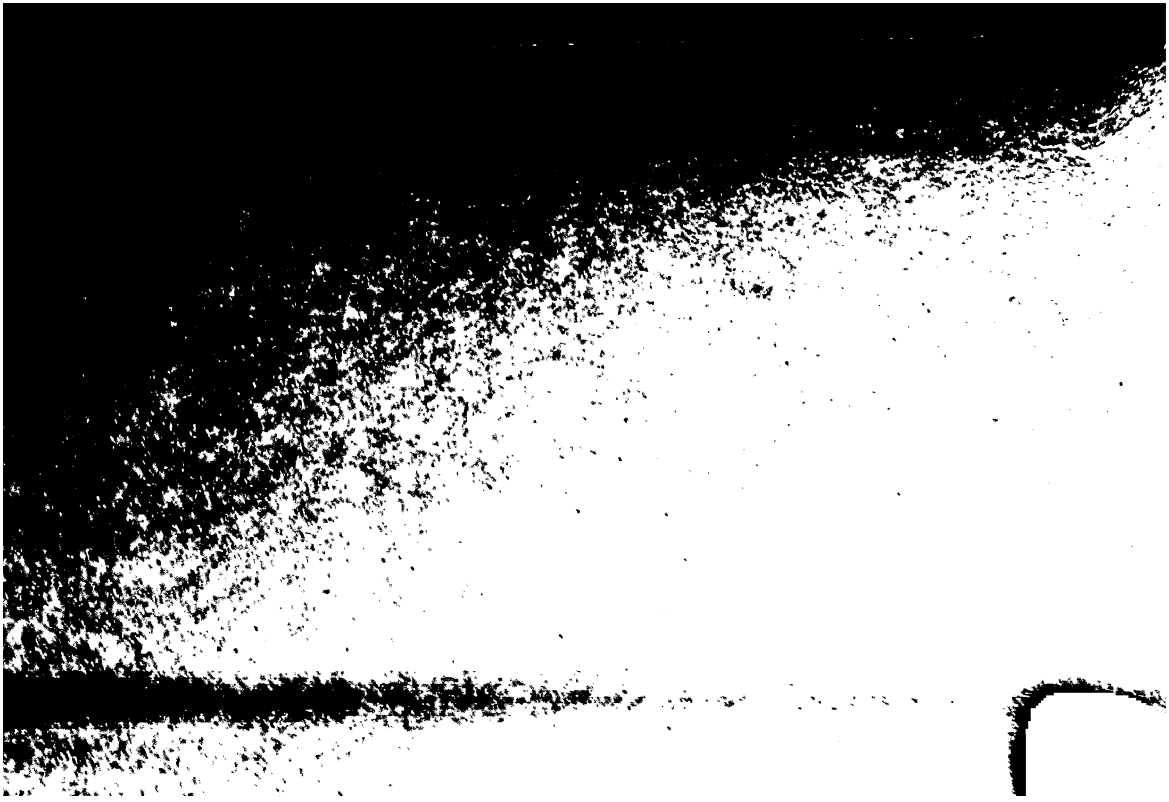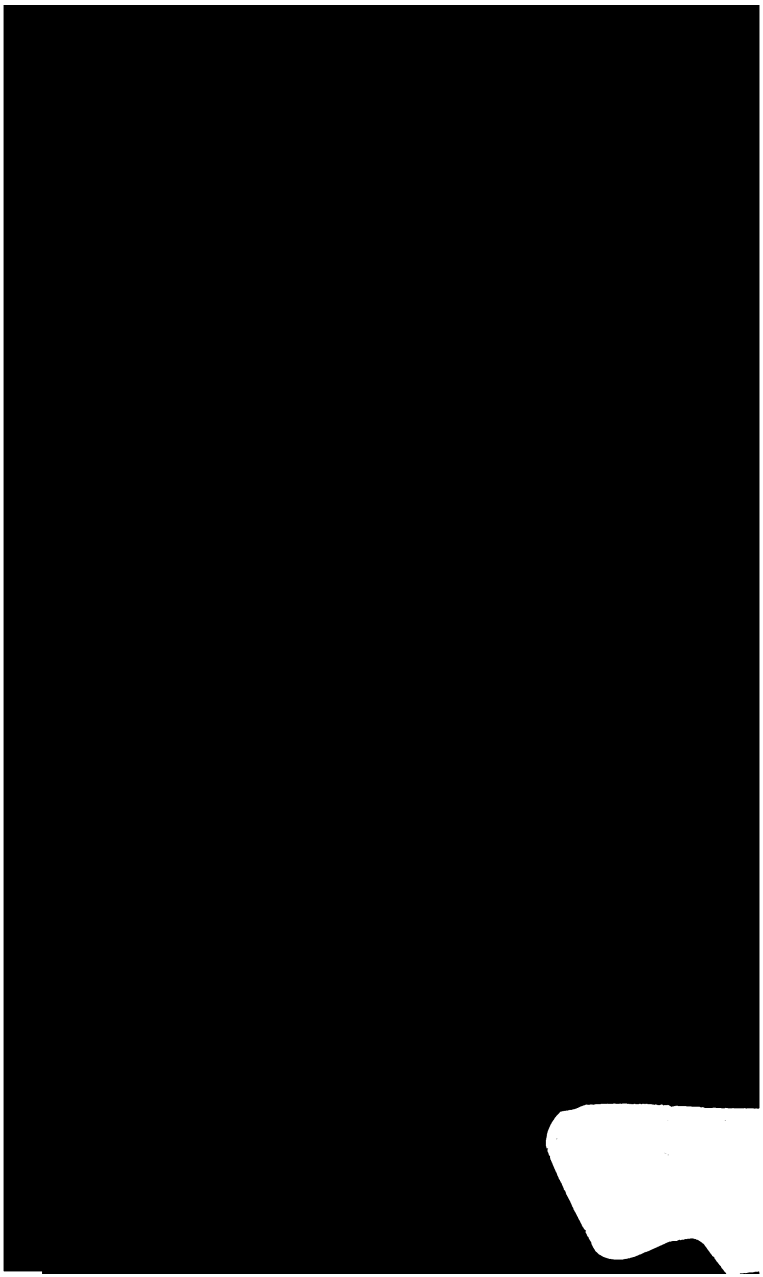
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